# Report on the Field Testing of the Proposed Children's Services National Minimum Data Set

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Board Chair
Professor Sandra Hacker

Director
Dr Richard Madden

Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Fadwa Al Yaman
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GPO Box 570
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: (02) 6244 1146

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# Introduction

This is a report on the first stage of the development of a National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) for children's services (child care and preschool services) in Australia[1]. It specifically reports on a field test of the data elements contained in the data manual (Version 1.0) as endorsed by the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) Children's Services Data Working Group. However, as a result of issues identified during discussions of the data elements, the report goes beyond the field test, to examine more fundamental issues relating to the structure of the NMDS.

No systematic, national collection of information on children's services exists in Australia. Individual States and Territories collect information on the services within their jurisdictions that they provide and/or fund, while the Commonwealth collects information separately on services it funds. As a consequence of this, the Senate inquiry on child care funding (which reported in December 1998) recommended that 'a more coordinated approach to data collection' be adopted (SCARC 1998: vii).

The Children's Services Data Working Group (the Working Group) was set up in April 1998 by the NCSIMG in order to improve national children's services data. This Working Group is composed of representatives of the relevant Commonwealth, and State and Territory departments, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)[2]. All jurisdictions recognise that nationally consistent and comparable information is vital in order to monitor and evaluate the provision and delivery of child care and preschool services and to provide more useful performance data for the Steering Committee on Commonwealth/State Service Provision's Report on Government Services (SCRCSSP 2001).

During 1998 and 1999 the Working Group examined issues associated with the development of a National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) for children's services. The NMDS is a set of data elements, data definitions and data standards that all jurisdictions—the Commonwealth and all the States and Territories—agree to. As part of the process of developing a NMDS for children's services, decisions had to be made about the scope of the data set, the level at which data are to be collected, the definition of services and the data elements and associated definitions.

In 1998–99, the AIHW in collaboration with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) prepared a report examining data definitions and classifications in various children's services and other relevant data collections in order to inform the development of a children's services NMDS (AIHW 2000). This report highlighted the difference in approaches and the resulting lack of consistency in the current collection of information on children's services across Australia. Drafts of the AIHW report were circulated among the members of the Working Group during late 1998 and early 1999 and formed the basis of discussions on the establishment of a NMDS, the data elements to be included in an NMDS and draft data definitions.

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[1] Children's services are preschool and child care services for children under school age and children of primary school age.

[2] In jurisdictions where children's services are funded and/or licensed by more than one department, the department responsible for child care is the jurisdictional representative.

As a result of these discussions, the AIHW and FaCS proposed a project to the NCSIMG Working Group to develop a draft data manual for the first stage of the NMDS and to field-test this data manual. The NCSIMG Working Group subsequently agreed to this project. The draft data manual (See Appendix 1) incorporates the current NMDS subject to further refinements and testing.

# What is the children's services National Minimum Data Set (NMDS)?

The children's services NMDS is a set of data elements, including definitions, classifications and standards, to be collected and reported on across children's services in all jurisdictions throughout Australia. One objective of the NMDS is to set information about children's services within a logical and appropriate framework. The framework shows the relative relationships of current data on children's services and allows the identification of gaps, overlaps and deficiencies in data collection. The framework also provides a structure for further development of information on children's services. As well as providing a national picture of the extent and use of children's services the data collected by the NMDS could contribute to an assessment of whether the objectives set by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories for children's services are being met.

The NMDS could also be used:

- to measure relative performance against agreed indicators (accessibility, affordability, quality of care, etc.);

- to monitor national trends over time;

- to monitor and evaluate policies that affect children's services;

- to identify the impact of early intervention programs; and

- to provide linkages with other relevant data sets that relate to children.

The data elements in the NMDS manual are described and defined using a standard template endorsed by the NCSIMG. These are the same standards and definitions used in the National Community Services Data Dictionary (AIHW 2000). A copy of the elements of the draft NMDS data manual on which the field test was based is attached (Appendix 1).

The draft children's services NMDS data manual (Version 1.0) specifies that the data are to be collected at the outlet level where the outlet is defined as organisational unit which delivers children's services. This is relatively straightforward in centre-based care provision. For family day care the outlet is the home of each care giver[3] while for mobile services the outlet is situated at each location at which the mobile offers services. Data are to be collected from funded and/or licensed services, with the exception of licensed home-based carers not attached to a family day care scheme (for example licensed baby sitting agencies in South Australia). Most data elements are to be collected by 'service type'. Data are to be collected on all children using the services and on all child care workers who directly care for children, including self-employed caregivers and paid employees. The data are to be collected during a specified time period each year known as the 'reference week'. The range of funded service

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[3] For family day care it may be more practical and efficient to collect data from the outlets (ie caregivers' homes) through the coordination units.

types to be included in the scope of the NMDS is long day care centres, family day care, preschool, occasional care, before school care, after school care, vacation care, play school and play centres. Play groups and toy libraries are included only if offered at an outlet providing another type of funded service.

# Existing data on children's services

Although there is no single system of collecting data on children's services in Australia, a number of organisations collect some information. Existing data collections are described below and problems with the current data collections are described in the next section.

The ABS conducts a sample survey (ABS Child Care Survey) to collect information from parents on the use of, and demand for, child care and preschool services throughout Australia. This survey has been conducted every 3 to 4 years since 1969, and is a supplement to the ABS Labour Force Survey. Respondents are asked to give information on their use of child care and preschool services in the week prior to the interview and vacation care in the previous 12 months.

Most State and Territory governments collect information from service providers on services that they provide, fund and/or license, although there are great variations in the nature and extent of these collections. Only South Australia conducts an annual census of all service providers in its jurisdiction, whether or not they are State-funded.

Separately from the States, the Commonwealth Government collects information on services that it funds. FaCS administers two data collections that cover all child care service providers who receive funding through the Commonwealth's support for child care. One is the Centrelink administrative data collection and the other is the Commonwealth Census of Child Care Services.

Since the introduction of the Commonwealth Child Care Benefits (CCB) in July 2000, Centrelink (which is responsible for processing the CCB claims) has two data systems relating to child care services. One system collects and maintains information about families and children eligible for CCB; the other—Child Care Operator System (COS) contains a limited amount of data about service providers.

The Commonwealth Census of Child Care Services has been conducted annually but does not cover all service providers in every year.  Between1993 and 1997, data were collected on a selection of services in each of these years. No census was conducted in 1998, but a complete census of all types of services was undertaken in May 1999. A census of family day care services, multifunctional services, Aboriginal services and mobiles was conducted in May 2001. A full census of all types of services will be undertaken in May 2002. The following types of service providers are covered in the census: long day care centres, family day care (FDC) schemes and caregivers, occasional care centres, before- and after-school care and vacation care service providers, multifunctional service, multifunctional Aboriginal services, Aboriginal play groups and mobiles.

Although the NMDS is designed to cover State/Territory and Commonwealth Collections, it will be important for the NMDS to be consistent and comparable with other collections. For instance, the Health Insurance Commission (HIC) also keeps additional information on children as part of the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register. Children need to be fully immunised (age appropriate) in order to receive the CCB. In future the NMDS should also enable the rationalisation of the various Commonwealth and State/Territory child care and preschool data collections.

# Problems with existing data collections

It is not possible to combine the data of the different jurisdictions to produce a national picture of child care and preschool services. There are many reasons for this, such as, differences in the scope and coverage of the data collections of the various jurisdictions and in the data classifications and definitions used in those collections.

**Coverage and scope**

The Commonwealth collects information on services that are approved for the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit and/or receive direct Commonwealth funding (such as capital or operational funding). Commonwealth data collections thus cover all long day care centres, and family day care schemes, most before-and after-school and vacation care services, some occasional care services, all multifunctional services, all multifunctional Aboriginal children's services and some mobile services. States and Territories collect information on services that they provide and/or fund—most dedicated preschool services, some occasional care services, some vacation care services and some mobile services. They also collect information about services which they licence, some of which (e.g. playcentres in Tasmania) are neither approved for CCB, nor receive direct funding from any jurisdiction. States and Territories differ considerably in the extent of data they collect about their licensed and/or funded services.

In some jurisdictions data on State/Territory funded and/or licensed children's services can be obtained from the one department, while in others they have to be obtained from two departments. In Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT, child care services and preschool services are funded and/or licensed by the same department. In the other jurisdictions, however, Western Australia, Northern Territory New South Wales and Queensland—all or some preschool services are funded by the education department, while all child care services (and in some jurisdictions, some preschool services) are funded and/or licensed by the community services department.

Commonwealth and State/Territory data collections cannot simply be added together to provide a national picture of children's services without double counting some outlets, services and children. This is because in some circumstances, the Commonwealth and the States/Territories collect data about the same services. This typically occurs where services attract both Commonwealth and State/Territory funding and/or where the service attracts Commonwealth funding and is licensed by the State/Territory. For instance, all long day care centres in Victoria are licensed by the State government, almost all are approved for the Commonwealth CCB and many centres receive funding from the State government to employ an appropriately qualified teacher to provide a preschool program for children of the appropriate age. Similarly New South Wales licences all long day care centres, most of these centres are approved for the CCB and most of the community-managed centres receive operational funding from the State government.

**Data comparability and compatibility**

As noted in the report on the comparability of children's services data collections (AIHW 2000), data definitions and the questions used to collect particular data elements in the various States, Territories and the Commonwealth vary between jurisdictions and have varied over time within jurisdictions. It is therefore difficult to compare trends between jurisdictions and over time. Even where the definitions of data elements have been consistent within data collections, these definitions do not always meet national definitions established by the ABS and those included in the National Community Services Data Dictionary. This makes the use of other ABS data on children problematic. For example, there is a lack of

comparability between numerators (from the children's services data collections) and denominators (from the ABS), for the estimation of population rates.

Obtaining comparable data on preschool services is particularly difficult, since these services are provided in a variety of models in different jurisdictions. Traditional 'sessional' preschool services are provided in a school or community facility and operate during school terms only. Sessional programming involves a distinct group of children meeting for a number of sessions per week, but the length of the session and the number of sessions per week differs within and across jurisdictions. Preschool services can also operate in long day care centres. In these circumstances, specific times may be set aside to operate the preschool service, or it may be integrated with the long day care service. The age at which children are eligible to attend preschool services also varies between jurisdictions.

**Accurate estimation of numbers of children**

The total number of children using child care and preschool services cannot presently be estimated accurately. For instance, vacation care and before/after school care services are offered at different times of the year and therefore children who attend both types of services are double counted. Other examples of double counting occur when children use services provided in more than one outlet during the reference week, for example, children attending dedicated preschools for two days in a week and long day care centres for the remainder of the week. Double counting of children can also occur if a child uses more than one type of funded service provided by a single outlet where two separate data collection forms need to be completed for each service type.

A national minimum data set for children's services needs to address all these issues.

# Field testing of the NMDS data elements

The aim of the field test was to assess the feasibility of the proposed data elements in the NMDS data manual version 1.0 and their potential to produce nationally consistent, comparable and comprehensive data for the description and analysis of the provision of children's services in Australia.

The Commonwealth, Queensland, Tasmania, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory representatives on the NCSIMG working group and an officer from the Queensland Department of Education provided AIHW with details of service providers who might be willing to assist with the field test. The AIHW staff approached a small number of child care service providers in these three States and the Australian Capital Territory. The aims and objectives of the NMDS and the field test were explained to senior staff at these outlets and they were asked whether they would agree to participate in the field test.

The choice of service providers approached was based on the following criteria:

- the full range of types of services were covered by these outlets;
- a complex service structure such as that provided by multi-purpose centres and mobiles was included;
- a range of outlet sizes was represented;
- the outlets were located in both rural and urban settings;
- at least one specific Aboriginal service provider was included;
- outlets were run by a variety of sponsors eg community managed, local government and private-for-profit.

The child care outlets visited during the field test together with some of their details are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Contact details of children's services for the field test of the NMDS forms, September-November 2000**

| State | Date and day of visit | Types of services offered | Funding |
|---|---|---|---|
| ACT | Monday 18/9/2000<br>2:00-4:30 p.m. | i)  Play school<br>ii) Before school care, after school care, vacation care<br>iii) Ed gym | i) Registered for CCB<br>ii) Approved for CCB<br>iii) Unfunded |
| ACT | Tuesday 26/9/2000 1:30-4:00 p.m. | i) Family day care coordination unit (toy library, playgroup)<br>ii) Occasional care | i)Approved for CCB<br>ii) Operational funding from ACT, ACT fee relief |
| NSW | Wednesday,4/10/2000<br>12:00-4:00 p.m. | i)  Long day care<br>ii) Vacation care<br>ii) After school care, Harvest program<br>iv) Occasional care<br>v)  Preschool | i) Approved for CCB, State operational funding<br>ii) Approved for CCB, Commonwealth DAS (disadvantaged areas subsidy)<br>iii) Approved for CCB<br>iv) Registered for CCB, State operational funding<br>v) Registered for CCB, State operational funding, State fee relief |
| ACT | Thursday 12/10/2000 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. | i) Long day care, vacation care<br>ii) Occasional care<br>iii) Playschool<br>iv) Ed Gym | i) Approved for CCB<br>ii) Approved for CCB as part of long day care (LDC) funding<br>iii) Registered for CCB<br>iv) Unfunded |
| Qld | Monday 16/10/2000 9:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. | Preschool | State operational funding (Dept of Education) |
| Qld | Monday 16/10/2000<br>2:00-4:30 p.m. | i) After school care<br>ii) Vacation care | i) Approved for CCB<br>ii) Approved for CCB, Commonwealth DAS |
| Qld | Tuesday 17/10/2000 1:30-4:00 p.m. | i) Long day care<br>ii) Preschool, occasional care, before school care, after school care, vacation care | i) Approved for CCB<br>ii) Approved for CCB as part of LDC funding |

**Table 1 (continued): Contact details of children's services for the field test of the NMDS forms, September-November 2000**

| State | Date and day of visit | Types of services offered | Funding |
|---|---|---|---|
| Qld | Wednesday 18/10/2000 8:00-10:30 a.m. | Kindergarten, preschool | State operational funding (Dept of Education). Registered for the CCB |
| ACT | Friday 20/10/2000 1:15-3:15 p.m. | i) Preschool ii) Early intervention services | i) State operational funding (Children's Services) ii) State operational funding (Child Health and Development) |
| Tas | Tuesday 31/10/2000 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. | Occasional care | State/Commonwealth Neighbourhood Model funding, State capital funding for new centre, registered for CCB |
| Tas | Tuesday 31/10/2000 2:00-4:30 p.m. | Family day care | Approved for CCB |
| Tas | Wednesday I/11/2000 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. | i) Occasional care ii) Back-up care | i) Approved for CCB ii) State government operational funding |
| Tas | Wednesday I/11/2000 2:00-3:30 p.m. | Play centre | Registered for CCB |
| NSW | Thursday 23/11/00 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. | Preschool | State operational funding, State fee relief, registered for CCB |
| NSW | Thursday 23/11/00 1:30-5:00 p.m. | i) Long day care ii) Occasional care | i) Approved for CCB ii) Approved for CCB as part of LDC funding |
| NSW | Wednesday 29/11/00 10:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. | Preschool, play session, toy/parent library | Commonwealth operational funding Preschool service registered for CCB |
| NSW | Thursday 30/11/2000 not visited | Long day care | Commonwealth block grant funded |

The staff approached at the child care services all agreed to participate without reservations. All the staff interviewed were concerned that the data collected from the children's services sector should be of good quality and should reflect the state of the sector today. All staff were committed to providing children's services of a high quality which met both children's and parents needs—they were concerned that the quality of child care offered in Australia should be as high as possible.

Seventeen different outlets were visited between September and November 2000. While some of these outlets offered one type of service, others offered a number of services. The outlets visited were as follows: three long day care centres, one family day care scheme, one family day care scheme and occasional care centre, one kindergarten and dedicated preschool, three dedicated preschools, one multipurpose centre, two occasional care centres, two outside school hours care centres, one play centre, one mobile service and one multifunctional Aboriginal centre. Information on the multifunctional Aboriginal centre was not collected however, because the director was absent due to bereavement in the family.

Since most outlets offered more than one type of service, a form that covered all services was used to collect the data for the NMDS field testing. It was understood that this was not necessarily the method which would be used in the actual NMDS collection; various methods may be used to collect NMDS data such as through administrative records, surveys or incorporating specific NMDS data elements in the existing Commonwealth and State/Territory data collections. These issues need to be discussed and decided by the Working Group.

In addition, in order to test the practicality of collecting disaggregated information on staff and children, two versions of the form to collect the data elements on staff and children were trialed during the field test—one form collected aggregate information, the other collected information on individual children and staff.

Although the initial form was based on data elements in the NMDS data manual, it became apparent during the field testing that additional questions need to be added and/or existing questions altered in order to collect the required information. Therefore, in the course of the field testing a number of modifications to the original form were made to canvass alternatives. These issues are discussed in the following section under each relevant data element.

Because a questionnaire had to be designed to test the data elements, it is possible that some of the issues, which were raised in the field test, may be related to the questionnaire itself. However, the main issues which arose in the field testing were related to the complexity of some of the data elements and to a lack of clarity in the definitions (as set out in the NMDS data manual Version 1.0) and in the rationale for collecting particular data elements.

# Results of the field test

The data elements discussed are grouped into the following categories: outlet identification, location and setting; funding (including the Child Care Benefit); accessibility, fees, places, workers qualifications, children's attributes and service use.

## Identification, location and setting

**Data elements: 'Outlet identifier', 'Address', 'Service delivery setting'**

**'Outlet identifier'**

The organisational structure of some outlets was complex. Some outlets visited had a number of services offered on site and also administered other outlets running other child care services. For example one outlet in the in the ACT provided before-and after-school care, vacation care, play school and education gym services at one location but also administered four off-site before- and after-school care and vacation care services in other locations.

One issue in identifying the outlet was that because some outlets offering more than one type of service have more than one name, there was difficulty in knowing which name to use on the form. Additionally some outlets have a common business name and additional names according to the type of service they provide at different locations.

Some service providers did not know how to define themselves in terms of the data element 'outlet'. Some family day care coordination units, for instance, are responsible for a number of family day care caregivers, as well as running other child care services where the coordination unit is located. These service directors and managers were uncertain about how to identify the outlet.

**'Address'**

The service providers were asked to write the street address (physical location) of their outlets. There were no problems encountered with collecting this data element. This data element will be used to derive '**Geographical location' and 'Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification'**.

**'Service delivery setting'**

The service provider was requested to identify whether the services provided were centre-based, home-based, or mobile. Due to some confusion by the respondents early in the field test, the setting classification was modified as 'fixed locations' (sub-divided into centre and private home)' and 'mobile'. The latter classification, however, is not ideal because mobiles also offer their services at fixed locations. The problem with this data element is that the category 'mobile' is a description of a mode of service delivery rather than a 'setting' of service delivery. While there had been some concern as to how preschool services located in a school would be classified, most directors had no difficulty in classifying their outlet by service delivery setting. All directors of dedicated sessional preschools identified their setting as 'centre-based'.

One problem with this data element occurred where a licensed vacation care service was offered in a workplace and the director administering the service was not sure whether this setting would be classified as centre-based. With one case identified in only 17 centres

visited, it is likely that a number of workplace-based outlets exist, although this is not recognised in the NMDS.

**Type of service and funding ('Child Care Benefit')**

**Data elements: Type of service and 'Child Care Benefit'**

**Type of service**

The service provider was asked to state what funded and/or licensed services were provided at the outlet. A number of issues became apparent when collecting data on this element. These are listed below:

One of the main issues in the field testing related to how outlets were funded and/or licensed compared with how they operated. As stated in the data manual, the scope of the NMDS includes government outlets; outlets funded by Commonwealth and/or State and Territory governments to deliver children's services; and outlets which are licensed, but not funded, to deliver children's services. The data manual states that most data elements should be collected by type of funded and/or licensed service. Despite careful wording of the question (following the data manual), during the course of the skirmish, considerable confusion among service providers as to whether they should provide data according to the funding/licensing label or according to what they actually provided under this label. Many outlets were funded/licensed to provide one type of service but in fact offered a number of other services. Some long day care centres, for example, provided long day care but also preschool, occasional care, and after school-care for primary school children. Similarly, long day care was only one of the services offered in family day care — most carers also offered occasional care, before and after school care and vacation care. Additionally, there is also an increasing trend for some occasional care centres to offer long day care and thus become de facto long day care centres. In all these cases, outlet directors were uncertain as to whether they should complete the form only for the services for which they were funded and/or licensed, or whether they should report on all services that they offered. Particular confusion arose where preschool services (commonly staffed by qualified preschool teachers) were offered in a long day care centre, but these services did not receive States/Territory preschool funding. In these cases, directors were uncertain as to whether they should indicate that they provided a preschool service.

The list of 'service types' provided on the form (and taken from the NMDS data manual) did not cover all those within the scope of the NMDS. 'Kindergarten', a well-recognised children's service in Queensland for children in the year before preschool, is not represented in the NMDS but has many similarities with 'playschool' in the ACT and 'playcentre' in Tasmania.

There was an issue as to whether some of the 'service types' included in the NMDS should be regarded as 'services' or as 'resources' in the data manual Version 1.0. Playgroups and toy libraries are included in the scope of the NMDS when offered in conjunction with other children's services. However, some directors argued that because parents must be in attendance at all times, these services should not be considered as children's services but as 'resources'. The director of the mobile service, however, felt that toy libraries were a 'service'. It was also felt that other resources provided by outlets should be included in the NMDS, such as book libraries for parents and children, language games libraries, child equipment lending services (e.g. car seats, cots), the mentoring of family day care carers, and carer training.

**'Child Care Benefit'**

The provider was asked to state whether the individual service types that are provided were approved for the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit.

The data element CCB was included in the NMDS to identify those outlets that receive State or Territory funding and that also receive Commonwealth funding. Although in the original questionnaire service providers were asked only if any of the services they provide were 'approved for the CCB', the category 'registered for the CCB' was added during the field test to eliminate confusion among some respondents.

During the field testing it was found necessary to include an additional question in order to identify service providers who received both Commonwealth and State and Territory funding. Providers were asked whether they received any operational government funding and if so what was the source of this funding. Another question was also included on whether each particular service type was reported on in the Commonwealth Child Care Census. This question was included as an alternative to the CCB question to identify outlets receiving Commonwealth funding. This question helped some directors who were not sure about their funding status with regard to the CCB.

The following issues were encountered during the field test.

(i) According to the NMDS data manual the data element 'CCB status' was to be collected at the outlet level. However, the field test confirmed that many outlets provided a number of services, some of which attracted the CCB and others which did not, but received other State/Territory funding or were unfunded (Table 1). Therefore information on the CCB may be incorrect if collected at the outlet level—an outlet may deliver more than one type of service but only some of these services are approved for the CCB

(ii) Most service providers knew whether the service type was approved for the CCB, what type of operational funding they received and whether or not their services were included in the Commonwealth Child Care Census. Service directors of some preschools and kindergartens, and playcentres/playschools, however, did not always know whether or not they were registered for the CCB.

## Accessibility

**Data elements: 'Weeks of operation-per year', 'Service availability-weekly'**
Derived data elements: 'Service availability-hours per day' and 'Service availability-days per week'

**'Weeks of operation-per year'**

This information was collected by type of service. Only one outlet had difficulties with this question. This was a mobile service offering two preschools, one weekly and the other fortnightly, in different locations. The first service was offered for 40 weeks per year and the other for 20 weeks per year This highlighted a problem particular to mobile services in that mobiles offer their services on a fortnightly roster or rotation. If data for the NMDS are to be collected for one 'reference week' only, some services offered less frequently will not be captured in the data collection.

**'Service availability-weekly'**

For this data element a table was used to collect, by type of service the start and finish times of each service on each day of the week.

This question confused directors of mobile services who operated services at different locations for different periods of time and preschool directors running overlapping sessions.

**Fees**

It was found during the course of the field test that collecting information on fees charged for child care and preschool services is not a simple matter. A wide variation in fee rates exist, dependent upon factors such as the type of service, the period of time to which the fees apply (daily, hourly), the frequency care is used (part time, full time), the regularity with which it is used (regular, casual or emergency), the age of the child, the number of children a family has in care and whether items such as nappies, meals or transport are included in the overall fee or are charged for separately.

**Data elements: 'Shortest fee period', 'Hours in the shortest fee period' 'Maximum fee in the shortest fee period' 'Longest fee period', 'Hours in the longest fee period' 'Minimum fee in the longest fee period'**

Derived data elements: 'Maximum hourly fee', 'Minimum hourly fee'

In order to capture these complexities the questionnaire provided three tables. The first table collected information on the period/s for which fees were charged (hour, session, day, week, term or year) by type of service. This recognised that it is possible to charge fees for more than one period for any type of service. The second table asked service providers to state how many hours were included in these periods. The third table asked for the actual maximum and minimum fees charged for each type of service for each of the periods. An additional question on administrative levy charges was included in the form for family day care schemes only, in order to collect more comprehensive information on the cost of child care across different types of services.

Prior to the field testing and in consultation with the Commonwealth it was agreed that the data element relating to government fee relief 'Amount of fee relief available in the longest period' would not be collected from outlets since it was more efficient to obtain these data from administrative records.

The following issues relating to fees emerged during the field-testing:

**'Shortest fee period', 'Longest fee period'**

Some vacation care centres charged fees for half-days while others charged for 'long days' and 'short days'. Some of these periods are not covered by the NMDS data manual Version 1.0.

**'Hours in the shortest fee period', 'Hours in the longest fee period'**

In the case of a preschool/kindergarten, the same fee was charged per term, but the terms were of variable length. These types of issues are not captured in the data manual Version 1.0.

**'Maximum fee in the shortest fee period', 'Minimum fee in the longest fee period'**

(i) The issue of a 'minimum and maximum hourly fee' remains very problematic. Fee structures are complex and are highly variable across services. Outlets charge varying fees according to factors such as age of child, length of period of care and frequency of use. It became obvious during the field test that 'highest' and 'lowest' fees relate to different service contexts. For example, some outlets offered weekend care and late night care. Fees for care

offered outside of 'normal working' hours were charged at a considerably higher rate than for care offered during 'normal working' hours. When directors of these outlets were asked to state their 'highest' fee, they responded with these unusually high fees for care offered outside normal working hours. These directors commented that this gave a distorted picture of their fee structure compared with outlets, which offered care during normal working hours only. Deriving a 'minimum and maximum hourly fee' from these figures is likely to produce data which are not comparable, because they refer to very different contexts or situations.

There were also some issues that related to fees in general.

(i) An important issue in relation to data comparability is determining what items are covered by the fees charged. For example, at some long day care centres, fees included a nappy charge, while at other centres nappy costs were an additional charge. Some vacation care centres included all excursions in the fee while others charged extra for excursions. Other items that were covered by the fee in some outlets, but were charged for separately by others included food, gym classes and transport. Where fees covered these items, directors were unable to quote charges exclusive of these items. This makes comparability of data on fees very problematic.

(ii) The data elements in the NMDS data manual Version1.0, which relate to fees, did not address the collection of information on the 'voluntary contribution' asked for by some State/Territory funded preschools. The 'voluntary contributions' observed in the field test ranged from $20 per year in Queensland to $180 per year in the Australian Capital Territory.

(iii) Although it was easy to collect the information on the administrative levy from family day care schemes, other types of services (e.g mobiles) also charged an administrative levy. These types of charges are not captured in the data manual.


**Data element: 'Place-status'**


## Funded and licensed places

According to the NMDS data manual Version 1.0, information is to be collected on places according to the following categories: 'funded and licensed'; 'funded but not licensed'; 'licensed but not funded'; and 'neither funded nor licensed' ('funding' refers to government funding). For preschool services, it is recommended that information be collected on enrolments.

The definition of a 'licensed place' in the data manual is accurate. According to the manual, 'the number of licensed places is equivalent to the maximum number of children allowed to receive a type of service at the outlet at any one time'. It became clear early in the field test, however, that the definition of a 'funded place' given in the data manual, is not accurate. According to the data manual, 'an outlet's number of places approved for funding is equivalent to the maximum number of children in care at a given time who are eligible for government funding'. This implies that the number of funded places is equal to the number of licensed places that are also funded, that is, a funded place is the same unit as a licensed place. It became apparent during the field test that a funded place, however, does not equal a licensed place, but refers to a block of time of care per week, which is variable by service type—and for occasional care services and dedicated preschools, within service types.

For some services types, a funded place can be occupied by more than one child (as long as this meets licensing regulations). For example in family day care the number of places approved for funding are known as 'equivalent full-time places' (EFT) where an EFT is

usually 35 hours of care per week. EFT may be divided between a number of children who attend less than 35 hours per week or one child can occupy more than one EFT if they attend 45 hours per week. In contrast, in the neighbourhood model occasional care centre in Tasmania, one funded place is equal to one session consisting of 3 hours only; only one child can occupy one funded place, but any one child can occupy more than one funded place (attend more than one session). This was not, however, the definition of 'funded place' for the other two types of occasional care included in the field test (centre-based care and back up care). Similarly, the definition of funded preschool places varied across the States and Territories. In the ACT, for instance, a funded place is equivalent to 10.5 hours per week (spread over three sessions) and one child can occupy only one place. By contrast, in New South Wales a funded preschool place is equivalent to 6 hours (one session a week), but one child can occupy two places (attend two sessions per week).

Early during the course of the field testing, it thus became clear that collecting data on the number of places which were 'funded and licensed', as recommended in the data manual, was problematic, since licensed places and funded places were often counted differently. Therefore the form was modified to collect information separately on the number of licensed places and the number of funded places by service type.

Several issues relating to places emerged during the field testing:.

(I) Providing information on the number of licensed places (where licensing applied) did not present difficulties for directors but many directors did not know the number of funded places. Where the sponsor was a larger organisation, the information was held at the highest level of management.

(ii) In some outlets, which delivered a number of services, the number of places offered for each type of service was changed on a regular basis to meet ongoing demands by families. Therefore, these directors of outlets were not able to split the total number of places by type of service. However in completing forms for jurisdictional data collections, these directors completed the forms according to official funding labels.

(iii)The concept of a funded place was often difficult to apply in a preschool situation. Some preschools (for instance, in the ACT) were required to enrol a minimum number of children in order to receive operational funding but that level of funding then up to the maximum number permitted in the preschool group (for example, the same funding covered between 17 and 24 children). In preschools in Queensland, in contrast, although directors are required to enrol a minimum number of children in order to receive funding, they are funded per child enrolled.


## Places offered/occupancy rate

One important issue that became apparent during the field test was that directors often made the decision to offer fewer (licensed) places than the total number for which they were licensed, for reasons of staffing, space problems or other issues relating to quality of care. The questionnaire was thus modified and an additional question included asking directors to report the actual number of places offered during the field test week. The actual number of places offered refers to the 'maximum number of children to whom outlets offer care at a given time. In order to investigate demand in relation to supply of services, a question was also included on occupancy rate during the week of the field test. This refers to the number of places used as a percentage of the number of places offered. Collecting information on the actual places on offer during the week of the field test did not present any problems for outlet directors. It was clear that they made that decision on a regular basis.

Providing information on the occupancy rate, however, created problems for some directors It is easy for directors to confuse the concept of a 'place' with the total number of children attending the service. Some directors had difficulty because they confused the maximum number of 'places' at any given time with the number of places available over the reference week. They multiplied the maximum number of places (e.g. 20) by 5 days and gave a figure of 100 places. Some directors took this approach because occupancy varied over the reference week and they did not know which day to use.

**Worker's qualifications**

**Data Element: 'Qualification status-paid primary contact worker'**

In order to collect information on the number of paid or self-employed child care and preschool workers who are physically caring for the children by qualification status and by type of service, the form included a table with the following categories: relevant formal qualifications, currently undertaking a relevant formal qualifications, no relevant formal qualifications and having more than 3 years experience in the child care area. This last category was added following consultation with the Commonwealth in order to identify staff who had no relevant qualifications and were not undertaking relevant qualifications but had relevant experience in child care area. A list of relevant qualifications was also included on the form.

Many outlet directors indicated that collecting aggregate data on staff qualifications under these categories led to errors in assembling the data because a worker could belong to more than one category and thus there would be double counting of staff. They also indicated that this method of data collection did not allow information to be obtained on staff with more than one qualification, nor to identify staff with no qualifications but more than 3 years experience. These issues did not arise with the unit record (individual) collection form.

The arbitrary use of '3 years of experience' was thought to downplay the actual experience of staff and some directors indicated that the actual number of years of experience of each worker should be collected. Again collecting this type of information was possible with the unit record (individual form) but not with the aggregate form. Another suggested the period of time spent working in the outlet would be more useful as an indicator of quality of care. Service providers indicated that staff turnover is high in children's services, because wages are low, and this turnover is of concern to directors.

**Children's attributes**

Table 2 shows a list of data relevant to children collected on the enrolment form of each outlet visited during the field test. While it is clear from this table that outlets vary in the questions asked and therefore in the quality and comparability of information elicited, it appears that there is a general recognition of the need to collect information on the basic characteristics of children. Information on date of birth, sex, cultural background and work status of parents was collected by most outlets visited. However, no information was collected on parental income and very few outlets collect information on Indigenous status. Although outlets collect information that can be broadly described as relating to disability, this information is focused more on medical conditions and special requirements. Nevertheless, the enrolment forms provide the foundation for introducing questions on children's attributes that would meet national standards and satisfy the NMDS requirements. Again many collecting this information using the individual form is more efficient and more useful for linking different child attributes to services.

**Data elements: 'Age of child', 'Indigenous status**

'Age of child'

These data elements collect information on the number of children in each age category (less than 1 year to 13 years and over) by type of service. All outlets visited held information on the date of birth of each child attending the service and had no difficulty in providing ages. A problem foreseen by one director was that if children attended more than one service provided by the outlet and supervisors of those different services filled in the form separately, there is a good possibility that some children would be double counted. This problem would not occur if data were collected on each individual child using services at the outlet (see note above).

**'Indigenous status'**

To collect this data element directors had to identify Indigenous status using categories recommended by ABS: neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander; Aboriginal only; Torres Strait Islander only and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. One of the main issues encountered during the field testing was that almost no outlets asked parents about the Aboriginal or Islander origins of a child at the time of enrolment (Table 2). The exception to this was in the ACT, where all preschools had a standard enrolment form with a question on Aboriginal status, although not using the standard ABS definitions. Most outlets were more interested in the language spoken at home and the child's country of birth.

A number of directors said that knowing initially whether a child was Aboriginal or not involved "guesswork", and Aboriginal identification requires getting to know the family over time. One service provider said that Aboriginal people would often not say they are of Aboriginal descent because they feared being stereotyped. One director said she could not tell by the appearance of the child and would have to ask everyone, which she would find difficult. Several service providers said they found the question difficult to ask.

**Service use**

**Use of services – hours**

This data element is designed to collect information to be used in the analysis of utilisation rate of service provision. The draft data manual Version 1.0 specified that the hours attended by children were to be grouped according to the following categories: 0, 0-<3, 3-<6, 6-<12, 12-<20, 20-<30, 30-<40 and 40+. Prior to testing the form, the Commonwealth informed us that many outlets use 'hours paid for' as a surrogate for hours attended. Therefore an additional question to collect information on 'hours paid for' was included on the form. The main issues encountered during the field testing were as follows.

(I) While the information on hours of attendance was readily available in most outlets from the attendance sheets of individual children, most directors disliked the question because it took too long to complete. The information has to be brought together for each child, and then aggregated according to the categories in the table. The sub-totals often did not add up due to minor errors in addition and the whole exercise had to be repeated to find the mistakes. Aggregating this information was seen by many directors as the most onerous part of completing the form and directors were happier to provide disaggregated data.

(ii) The concept of 'hours paid for' did not apply in preschool services and some other sessional services such as play centres and some occasional care services where fees are not charged. In all preschool services 'hours paid for' is synonymous with 'hours enrolled', and

except for illnesses and short absences, are the same as 'hours attended'. Since preschools are sessional, 'hours attended' is the same as the number of hours in the session. Most preschool directors thus did not have problems with providing aggregate data on children's attendance pattern.

**Table 2: Data relevant to Children's Services NMDS collected from parents/guardians of children on service providers' enrolment forms**

| Name of service | Date of birth | Sex | Indigenous status | Income | Non-English-speaking background | Disability | Work status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outlet 1 | DOB | M//F | Not collected | Not collected | Country of birth and primary language of parent and child Cultural background of parent | Not collected | Place of employment Occupation |
| Outlet 2 | DOB | M/F | Not collected | Not collected | Primary language spoken by child | Medical information which will help us provide better care for your child. *(Instruction to include information about disabilities)* | Place of employment |
| Outlet 3 | DOB | Sex | * | Not collected | Language(s) spoken at home Cultural background | Not collected | Occupation |
| Outlet 4 | DOB | M/F | Does your family regard itself as Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander? | Not collected | Languages spoken at home Mother's and Father's country of birth | Not collected | Not collected |
| Outlet 5 | DOB | Sex | * | Not collected | Language spoken Ethnicity | Not collected | Occupation |
| Outlet 6 | DOB | M/F | * | Not collected | Country of birth of child, mother and father Other languages spoken by child Cultural background Are [mother or father] from a Non-English Speaking Background? | Does your child have any problems with: hearing, sight, speech. Is your child presently receiving any therapy for the above? | Occupation |
| Outlet 7 | DOB | Not collected | Not collected | Not collected | Not collected | Is there any medical or physical condition from which your child/children suffer that needs to be brought to the attention of the Centre's staff. Please give details. | Not collected |

*(continued)*

- It is possible that, when asking about cultural background, indigenous status may be specified.

**Table 2 (continued): Data relevant to Children's Services NMDS collected from parents/guardians of children on service providers' enrolment forms**

| Name of service | Date of birth | Sex | Indigenous status | Income | Non-English-speaking background | Disability | Work status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outlet 8 | DOB | M/F | Not collected | Not collected | Language spoken at home | Special requirements e.g. disability needs | Not collected |
| Outlet 9 | DOB | M/F | Is the child of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent? | Not collected | Primary language of the family | Are there special requirements for medical treatment/ special needs or disability? | Occupation/ previous occupation |
| Outlet 10 | DOB | M/F | Not collected | Not collected | Primary language spoken at home | Does your child have any medical conditions for which medication may be needed or which may necessitate any special care? | Business name and address |
| Outlet 11 | DOB | Not collected | Not collected | Not collected | Not collected | If your child has any additional needs or requires any special care, please give details below. | Occupation and place of work/study |
| Outlet 12 | DOB | Not collected | Not collected | Not collected | Child's primary language | List any other relevant information e.g. Injury? Special aids such as spectacles, hearing aids or any other areas of concern: | Employment details |
| Outlet 13 | DOB | M/F | Not collected | Not collected | Language spoken at home | Any special requirements regarding religion, disabilities, or other. | Employer |
| Outlet 14 | DOB | Male/ Female | Is your child from an Aboriginal, Torres Strait or Australian South Sea Islander background? | Not collected | What language does your child speak? Country of birth Main language spoken at home | Does your child have a disability or medical history that we should know about? *(asked to provide details)* | Work/study details |
| Outlet 15 | DOB | M/F | Is any family member Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander? If yes, please specify. | Not collected | Country of birth of mother/father/ child Language/s spoken in the home | Does your child suffer from a disability? *(Asked to specify details.)* | Work days |
| Outlet 16 | DOB | F/M | Nationality: Koori/Murri/ Goori/ Other | Not collected | Not collected | Any disabilities? | Place of employment Contact details |

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The field visits to the outlets revealed many positives for the NMDS project.

There was a widespread acceptance of the general need to report information to funders about what services outlets provide with the government funding they receive, despite some concern about the number of different data collection activities occurring in the field, the time these take, and the perceived duplication or overlap and lack of consistency between different collections.

There was a general acceptance of the range or scope of information included in the NMDS, in broad terms—that is, outlets accepted that information about the children using the services, the nature and extent of their usage, outlet capacity and availability of services, cost to families and worker's qualifications were appropriate subjects of interest to funders and policy makers. However, the way these broad areas of interest were translated into specific questions caused some concern, most often for those outlets delivering multiple types of service.

The impression gained from many outlets was that if government were to require them to collect specific information, questions could be included in their standard forms, but that the benefits were greatest were the information was relevant to their own purposes as well as government. Concerns centred on the mechanisms of data collection but most directors stated that providing the data was facilitated by appropriate system support being made available. This is not to underestimate the extent of variation in current information systems (paper and computerised). The NMDS is essentially administrative by-product data that is derived from the day to day service delivery and management process. Standardising even a small number of questions for national reporting will require considerable effort and cost.

The "building blocks" of data included in the NMDS are mostly collected routinely by outlets. That is, outlets record children's sex, date of birth, and some information about "special requirements" related to disability or medical conditions, some cultural information (mostly language related), the days they attend, the times they arrive and leave and worker's qualifications. The specific information or questions asked vary, as does the particular system or form of documentation.

Most outlets expressed a preference for reporting unit record data for each child rather than having to aggregate data themselves for reporting to government (discussed further below). Given the advantages of unit record data to subsequent analyses, this level of reporting would have particular benefits to government funders needing a data set capable of supporting a wide range of inquiries/functions. It does however, have implications for the receipt, storage, collation and analysis of what would be a large dataset.

The following section summarises the key issues:

- Outlets are moving into a more flexible type of service provision in order to meet family needs and market demands. Despite the complexity of the NMDS as outlined in the data manual version 1.0, the data elements do not capture the present complexity of child care services nor the reality of service delivery. The approach is based heavily on type of service classification, which was developed for government funding/administrative purposes. Children's services have grown rapidly in the last decade, both in the number of places on offer, in the means of delivery and in the complexity of the way services are

offered, used and paid for by parents. Collecting data by 'type of service' according to funding and/or licensing labels is too restrictive in describing what happens on the ground and no longer fits the evolving situation in the provision of children's services. Therefore it is recommended that only information on the types of services offered is to be collected at the outlet level. Other information on the types of services the outlets are funded or licensed to provide can be collected from administrative records rather than from the outlet.

- Information about services *offered* by individual outlets could still be included in the NMDS and based on the field test would not be difficult to collect. Recognising that it is important that statistical output from the NMDS needs to be mappable to funded types of services, the potential gains in the quality of data reported using this approach are sufficient to warrant further Data Working Group considerations. For example inclusion of an additional data element about the child such as *school attendance* may be sufficient (when combined with other NMDS data elements) to identify care for school aged children. Most complexities exist with outlets funded for only one type of service but providing many other services e.g. long day care centre and outlets funded for more than one type of service. The extent to which these complexities need to be resolved in the NMDS depends on the strategic importance of resolving these issues in the light of their eventual purpose (use). The Data Working Group provides a forum for reaching agreements on acceptable uses of the data by various stakeholders.

- At present individual Commonwealth and State and Territory government departments may have more than one database containing information about outlets or service providers but the same outlet may be identified differently within each database. For instance, long day care centres approved for Child Care Benefit may be identified differently on the Commonwealth data base than on a State or Territory licensing data base. An agreement needs to be reached regarding the creation and use of a nationally unique outlet identifier. This will improve the coverage of outlets and give a clean count of outlets, therefore avoiding double counting of outlets.

- It is recommended that disaggreggated data be collected on children and workers. The collection of data in aggregate form was seen by service providers (except for some preschools directors) to be time consuming and likely to lead to errors in the reported data. The service providers stated that the disaggregated information had to be collected in order to provide the aggregated information, but that reporting the disaggregated information avoided the frustration and time wasted by making minor arithmetical mistakes in aggregation. There was also a concern that aggregate data on workers will result in an underestimation of the qualifications and experience of carers. Additionally, the aggregation of data by outlet does not allow any statistical analysis below that level. So, for example, it will not be possible to analyse data on children's services by the age, sex, Indigenous status, fees paid and so on, of the individual children in care.

- The current difficulty with obtaining an accurate count of children using children's services will not be addressed by the proposed NMDS as outlined in the data manual Version 1.0. For instance, it is likely that collecting aggregate data on 'attendance' by 'type of service' will overestimate the number of children in attendance at outlets that offer more than one service since children will be counted for each type of service that they attend. An NMDS collection based on unit record for each child attending services at the outlet would help to overcome this problem. However, children will still be double counted where outlets deliver both a Commonwealth funded service and a State funded service as each jurisdiction collects data on the individual children attending its funded

services. Children using services at different outlets—for instance, a preschool and a long day care centre—will also be double counted. The use of a statistical linkage key would assist in overcoming the problem of double counting and enable the most accurate estimate of the number of children attending children's services to be obtained. One possibility is to create a 'statistical linkage key' for each child similar to that used for aged care and disability databases4. This key is made up of the 2nd, 3rd and 5th letters of the family name and the 2nd and 3rd letters of the first given name, the date of birth [DD/MM/YYYY], and sex [1 or 2]). The key does not allow the individual to be identified in the database. Such a key will allow an accurate counting (sufficient for statistical purposes) of all children using the services and will solve the problem of double counting across outlets

- Date of birth is collected on most enrolment forms (Table 2). It is recommended that date of birth be collected rather than age of the child. Age can be derived from date of birth and its inclusion allows for any future use of a statistical linkage key.

- Although sex of the child is recommended for collection in stage 2 of the NMDS it appears to be routinely collected by outlets (Table 2). If there is an interest in statistical record linkage, sex is likely to be a component of a linkage key.

- Service providers had difficulty in providing information on Indigenous status of children. Service providers will need considerable training if the national standard question on the Indigenous status of children is to be implemented. It is also recommended that outlets include the question in their enrolment forms.

-  It is suggested that the Data Working Group consider the benefits of collecting the CCB Customer Reference number which is a unique number given to each child whose parents receive the Child Care Benefit as a direct reduction in their fees. The CCB number will enable linkages between some of the NMDS and Centrelink data on work related care and family income.

- The complexity of fee structure (by age of child, by frequency of care, by length of care, including and excluding add ons) means that the data elements on fees in the current NMDS do not provide meaningful or comparable data. Additionally, it is not clear what purpose these data are required for. It is not possible, for instance, to measure the affordability of services for families using these them since the actual cost for families (i.e. fees less fee relief payments) cannot be derived. Clarification of the purpose of the fee data elements would assist in refining this area of the NMDS.

- Some data relating to places are confusing and are not comparable across types of service. WE recommend replacing information on funded/licensed places with the number of places 'offered' in the reference week (the number of places offered in the reference week is equivalent to the 'maximum number of children to whom outlets offer care during the reference week'). This information would be readily available from outlets and is not available from any other source.

These conclusions and recommendations could more directly address the problems with existing data collection identified at the beginning of the report.

Implications of these issues for the current NMDS are summarised in Table 3.

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4. A statistical linkage key has been used successfully in the collection of information on government funded aged care services and government funded disability services.

**Table 3: Recommendations on each data element in the NMDS based on the field testing**

| | Data element | Data element type | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Outlet** | Outlet identifier | Data element | OK |
| | Address | Composite data element | OK |
| | Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification | Derived data element | OK |
| | Geographical location—SLA | Derived data element | OK |
| | Service delivery setting | Data element | OK. Minor modification to classification categories |
| | Type of service offered—children's services | Data element | OK. Clarification needs to be made between service type as a funding label and types of services offered |
| | Place—children's services | Data concept | Replace with ' places offered'. This is defined as a unit of service that can be used by a child at a given time. |
| | Place—status | Data element | If 'places offered' is accepted, replace with number of places offered by outlet by service type |
| | Weeks of operation – per year | Data element | OK. Minor modification<br>Collect by outlet by type of service |
| | Service availability – weekly | Data element | OK. Collect by outlet by type of service |
| | Service availability – hours per day | Derived data element | OK. Collect by outlet by type of service |
| | Service availability – days per week | Derived data element | OK. Collect by outlet by type of service |
| | Service availability – hours per week | Derived data element | OK. Collect by outlet by type of service |
| | Child Care Benefit—status | Data element | OK. Minor modification, include 'registered for CCB'<br>Collect by outlet by type of service<br>Clarify the context for collection of the CCB status |
| **Outlet** | Fee period | Data concept | The objective of collecting fees by type of service is not clear. If the purpose is to look at affordability of child care then net fees could be collected for each individual child. If the objective is to collect gross fees in order to model the impact of policy then these data elements need to be revised and standardised. Clarify the extent to which there is a need for information on gross fees in an NMDS to supplement existing data in order to report on out-of-pocket costs relative to family income performance indicator.  Possibly replace with fewer data elements reported per child such as net fee paid, percent of fee relief and period for which the fee is paid. |
| | Shortest fee period | Data element | |
| | Hours in shortest fee period | Data element | |
| | Maximum fee in shortest fee period | Data element | |
| | Maximum hourly fee | Derived data element | |
| | Longest fee period | Data element | |
| | Hours in longest fee period | Data element | |
| | Minimum fee in longest fee period | Data element | |
| | Minimum hourly fee | Derived data element | |
| | Amount of fee relief available in longest fee period | Data element | |
| | | Data element | |
| | Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief. | Derived data element | |
| | Minimum hourly fee less government fee relief | Derived data element | |

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**Table 3 (continued): Recommendations on each data element in the NMDS based on the field testing**

| | Data element | Data element type | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Children** | Child—children's services | Data concept | OK |
| | Age of child | Data element | OK. Recommend use date of birth<br>Collect unit record file for each child |
| | Indigenous status | Data element | OK<br>Collect and report for each child |
| | Use of services—hours | Data element | OK<br>Collect and report for each child |
| **Workers** | Worker—children's services | Data concept | OK |
| | Qualification status—Paid primary contact worker | Data element | OK. Minor modifications to classification categories<br>Collect and report for each worker |

# A way forward

A National Minimum Data Set reflects agreements by all stakeholders on the minimum information required for national reporting of data according to defined standards. Collecting information from all outlets delivering children's services in Australia is a costly and time consuming exercise for those involved in each stage of the process. This places particular importance on the process of deciding what constitutes a "minimum".

The "minimum" requirements of NMDS are generally related to the information required for accountability and policy and project development purposes. Identifying these requirements needs articulation of policy objectives and desired outcomes.

Despite variations between Commonwealth and State/Territory governments in the range of children's services funded and the broad policy or outcome frameworks they are designed to support, there appears to be a considerable degree of commonality at the highest level in the governments' overall objectives in funding children's services. There is also a high degree of commonality in the broad aims in providing children's services, such as accessibility (including affordability, availability, timing, awareness) and quality.

Developing options for the resolution of the outstanding issues revealed by the field test would benefit from a clearer articulation of the rationale or purpose of each data element. The AIHW has undertaken some preliminary work articulating a possible framework and performance indicators for the children's services sector. In doing this we have been mindful of the need for performance indicators to support reporting against a range of frameworks (for example the Productivity Commission). The outcome of this preliminary work is provided in Table 4. It is important to note that this has purely been an AIHW exercise to date to explore the potential of working through such a process to assist with resolving definitional issues and justifying the need to collect particular data elements.

**Table 4: Data elements of the Children's services NMDS in relation to proposed performance indicators for children's services and on current performance indicators for the Report on Government Service Provision**

| Performance area | Objective | Performance indicator | NMDS data element | Status of collection | Related performance area Report on Government Service Provision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ACCESSIBILITY**<br>Availability<br>  General community | 1. To ensure adequate provision of children's services | | | | Effectiveness<br>  Outcome<br>    Meeting family needs |
|   Target groups | 2. To ensure that children's services are available to children belonging to the following groups:<br><br>• both parents working (or sole parent), unemployed or studying/training<br>• single parents at home<br>• families with a child and/or parent with a disability<br>• child at risk<br>• child due to attend full time schooling in the following year<br>• parent at home with two or more children | 2.1 Proportion of children aged 0–12 with both parents (or sole parent) working who are using children's services | Work status | Not collected in stage 1 | Effectiveness<br>  Outcome<br>    Meeting family needs |
|   Special needs groups | 3. To ensure that children belonging to the following groups have equitable access to children's services:<br><br>• Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children<br>• Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds<br>• Children living in rural and remote areas | 3.1 Proportion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–12 using children's services | Indigenous status | Collected in stage 1<br><br>*Needs to be collected from sources other than the NMDS* | Effectiveness<br>  Access<br>    Special needs group |
| | | 3.2 Proportion of children aged 0–12 from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds using children's services | Not defined | Not collected in stage 1 | |
| | | 3.3 Proportion of children aged 0–12 from rural and remote areas using children's services | Derived from data element 'Address' | Collected in stage 1 | |

*(continued)*

**Table 4 (continued): Data elements of the Children's Services NMDS in relation to proposed performance indicators for children's services and indicators for the Report on Government Service Provision**

| Performance area | Objective | Performance indicator | NMDS data element | Status of collection | Related performance area Report on Government Service Provision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Timing | 4. To ensure that children's services are available at the times needed by families | 4.1 Proportion of outlets offering non-standard hours | Service availability—days per week<br>Service availability—hours per day<br>Service availability—hours per week<br>Service availability—weekly | Collected in stage 1 | Effectiveness<br>Access<br>General community |
| Affordability | 5. To ensure that the cost of children's services is not prohibitive to families needing them | 5.1 | Longest fee period<br>Maximum fee in shortest fee period<br>Maximum hourly fee<br>Minimum fee in longest fee period<br>Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief<br>Minimum hourly fee<br>Minimum hourly fee less government fee relief | Not possible to report on affordability from existing data elements on fees | Effectiveness<br>Access<br>General community |
| Awareness | 6. To ensure that families are aware of the assistance available | 6.1 | No data elements collected for either stage 1 or stage 2 | None | |
| **QUALITY** | 7. To ensure that children's services are appropriate to the needs of children | 7.1 Proportion of paid primary contact workers with relevant qualification(s) | Staff qualifications | Qualification status—paid primary contact worker | Effectiveness<br>Quality |

# Appendix 1: Children's Services National Minimum Data Set Data Manual Version 1.0

# Preface

# Contents

# List of data elements—alphabetical order

# 1  Introduction

This manual sets out draft data elements that will be the basis of reporting first stage data elements for the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (NMDS). This Minimum Data Set is being developed by the Children's Services Data Working Group of the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG). The working group is chaired by FaCS and includes representatives from relevant departments in each jurisdiction, AIHW and the ABS.

**Table 1: Proposed data items for the Children's Services Minimum Data Set**

|  | First stage | Second stage |
|---|---|---|
| **Characteristics of service** | Number of service providers (count)<br><br>Number of Places licensed or approved by government<br><br>Geographic location<br><br>Accessibility/availability indicators (full financial year of operation, hours of operation per day, days of operation per week, weeks of operation per year)<br><br>Fees or charges<br><br>Type of Service Provided |  |
| **Characteristics of children** | Numbers of children by service provider (aggregate)<br><br>Age (in years)<br><br>Usage (hours attended)<br><br>Indigenous indicator | Family Type<br><br>Sex<br><br>Income<br><br>Special needs (including culturally diverse and disability)<br><br>Work status of family |
| **Characteristics of workers** | Number of qualified/unqualified workers | Age<br><br>Employment Status (full time/part time)<br><br>Paid/Unpaid<br><br>Type of work performed (primary contact, other contact, Non contact)<br><br>Hours of Work |

# 2  The Children's services NMDS Data Manual

## 2.1  How to use the information on data elements and concepts

**Format of the data elements and concepts**

The data elements (or variables or items) contained in the manual are described and defined using a standard format or template endorsed by the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG). This standard format is based on ISO/IEC 11179 *Specification and Standardization of Data Elements*—the international standard for defining data elements issued by the International Organization for Standardization and the International Electrotechnical Commission. For consistency and ease of use, this standard has been applied in the National Community Services Data Dictionary and this Data Manual.

The standard rules applied to each data element definition are designed to ensure that each is clear, concise, unambiguous, comprehensive and provides sufficient information to ensure that all those who collect, provide, analyse and use the data, clearly understand its meaning. These rules describe the data. In technical terms these rules are called metadata—or information about data.

An illustration of how the format is used to define a particular data item in this dictionary can be found in the National Community Services Data Dictionary. A detailed description of each component of the format can also be found in the Data Dictionary V.2 (AIHW 2000)

## 2.2  Additional information on how to use the data manual

Each data definition contains the minimum procedural information necessary to achieve national consistency and comparability. However, the manual does not contain all the details required for the reporting and administration of a national data collection over time. Collecting and reporting arrangements are the subject of further discussions between jurisdictions. For example, those responsible for the ongoing management of a national data collection may also need to issue additional guidelines or instructions on data validation processes, file structures, data collection methodologies etc, to ensure that information collected meets the required standards of their collection. Additional information may also be required on use and collection methods for specific collections.

In order to clarify the information that is needed to obtain some outputs, other data definitions—which may not be required for reporting—are included in this Data Manual.

# 3 Scope of the NMDS

## 3.1 Outlets

In the Children's Services NMDS, an outlet is defined as the organisational unit which delivers a children's service. In terms of this NMDS, 'outlet' is considered as the main counting unit for the data collection. See Section 4 for a full definition of the concept 'outlet'.

**Outlets included in the NMDS:**

- Government outlets, i.e. Commonwealth or State/Territory outlets where the relevant government has primary responsibility for the delivery of at least one children's service. (For example, a preschool in a government school). That is, outlets where the Commonwealth or State/Territory government is the sponsor of at least one children's service.
- Outlets funded by Commonwealth and/or State/Territory governments to deliver children's services. This includes outlets that:
  - receive capital grants or operational funding from Commonwealth or State/Territory government;
  - receive funding as part of an approved educational establishment; and
  - are 'approved' for the Child Care Benefit.
- Outlets which are licensed but *not* funded by government to provide children's services

**Outlets excluded from the NMDS:**

- Outlets that are neither licensed nor funded by governments, including outlets that are only 'registered' for the Child Care Benefit, e.g. unlicensed home-based carers.
- Babysitting agencies, which are licensed in South Australia.
- Primary education: Full-time education which typically commences at around age 5 and lasts for 7–8 years. In New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, primary education extends from pre-Year 1 to Year 6 (or equivalent). In South Australia and the Northern Territory it extends from pre-Year 1 to Year 7 (or equivalent). In Queensland and Western Australia is extends from Year 1 to Year 7 (or equivalent).

## 3.2 Child population

**Children included in the NMDS:**

- All children using children's services during the reference week, at outlets which are within the scope of the NMDS. This includes children whose place has been paid for or children who are enrolled in a service, but are absent during the reference week.

**Children excluded from the NMDS:**

- Children using services at outlets which are neither licensed nor funded.

## 3.3 Worker population

**Workers included in the NMDS:**

- All paid, unpaid and contract workers working at children's services outlets which are within the scope of the NMDS during the reference week. This includes:
  - contract workers employed by an outlet where the contract is for the supply of labour (e.g. child care) rather than of products (e.g. nappy supplies); and
  - workers attending training courses away from the outlet for the entire reference week that are not replaced during their absence.

**Workers excluded from the NMDS:**

- Workers working at outlets that are neither licensed nor funded.
- Workers absent for the entire reference week, other than those attending training as specified above.

# 4  Data elements

Table 4.1 represents the specification of key outputs in the form of data elements as requested by the Children's Services Data Working Group alongside data elements as they currently appear in this data manual.

**Table 4.1: Key outputs as requested by the Children's Services Data Working Group that are derived from the data elements in this manual.**

| | Key output specified by the Working Group | Data Element | Data Element Type | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Outlets** | N/A | Outlet—children's services | Data concept | Required for the functionality of all other data elements relating to outlet. |
| | N/A | Agency—children's services | Data concept | Required when the concept of 'outlet' does not apply, e.g. Family day care schemes. |
| | Number of service providers (count) | N/A | | Outlets may be counted according to jurisdiction and type of service. Each jurisdiction would have a list of the outlets, which will be included in the scope of the MDS. |
| | N/A | Outlet identifier | Data element | Enables the linkage of agencies with outlets. |
| | Geographic location | Address | Composite data element | |
| | | Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification | Derived data element | |
| | | Geographical location—SLA | Derived data element | |
| | Type of Service Provided | Service delivery setting | Data element | |
| | | Type of service—children's services | Data element | |
| | Number of Places licensed or approved for funding by State/Territory | Place—children's services | Data concept | Required for the functionality of all other data elements relating to place. |
| | | Place—status | Data element | Places may be counted according to place status |
| | Full financial year of operation | N/A | | Excluded: synonymous with weeks of operation per year |
| | Weeks of operation per year | Weeks of operation – per year | Data element | |
| | N/A | Service availability – weekly | Data element | Required to obtain all other elements relating to service availability. |
| | Hours of operation per day | Service availability – hours per day | Derived data element | Derived using 'service availability – weekly' |
| | Days of operation per week | Service availability – days per week | Derived data element | Derived using 'service availability – weekly' |

**Table 4.1 continued**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Service availability – hours per week | Derived data element | Derived using 'service availability – weekly' |
| | Child Care Benefit indicator | Child Care Benefit—status | Data element | |
| | N/A | Fee period | Data concept | Required for the functionality of all other data elements relating to fees. |
| | Maximum hourly fee | Shortest fee period | Data element | Required to derive 'maximum hourly fee' |
| | | Hours in shortest fee period | Data element | |
| | | Maximum fee in shortest fee period | Data element | |
| | | Maximum hourly fee | Derived data element | Derived by dividing 'maximum fee in shortest fee period' by 'hours in shortest fee period'. |
| | Minimum hourly fee | Longest fee period | Data element | Required to derive 'minimum hourly fee' |
| | | Hours in longest fee period | Data element | |
| | | Minimum fee in longest fee period | Data element | |
| | | Minimum hourly fee | Derived data element | Derived by dividing 'minimum fee in longest fee period' by 'hours in longest fee period' |
| | Minimum hourly fee less government fee relief | Amount of fee relief available in longest fee period | Data element | Required to derive 'minimum hourly fee less government fee relief' |
| | | Longest fee period | Data element | |
| | | Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief. | Derived data element | Derived by subtracting 'amount of fee relief available in longest fee period' from 'minimum fee in longest fee period' |
| | | Minimum hourly fee less government fee relief | Derived data element | Derived by dividing 'minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief' by 'hours in longest fee period' |
| **Children** | N/A | Child—children's services | Data concept | Required for the functionality of all other data elements relating to child. |
| | Numbers of children by service provider (aggregate) | N/A | | Can be derived from other elements relating to child. |
| | Age (in years) | Age of child | Data element | |
| | Indigenous indicator | Indigenous status | Data element | |
| | Usage (hours attended) | Use of services—hours | Data element | |
| **Workers** | N/A | Worker—children's services | Data concept | Required for the functionality of all other data elements relating to worker. |
| | Qualifications | Qualification status—Paid primary contact worker | Data element | |

# Agency—children's services

*Admin. status:*　　　　DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*　　DATA CONCEPT

*Definition:*　　An organisation or unit within an organisation which is responsible for providing a children's service(s) at or from one or more outlets.

*Context:*　　An agency may or may not provide services to children, but is responsible for service provision, whether directly, administratively, or via allocation of funds.

　　This data concept is used in order to obtain a more detailed appraisal of service availability and how services are provided.

## Relational attributes

*Related data:*　　Is used in conjunction with: 'Service delivery setting', 'Outlet— children's services', and 'Type of service—children's services'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*　　Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*　　An agency may have more than one outlet from which children's services are delivered. It is also possible for an agency to be an outlet, as in the case of a private long day care centre, or a licensed home-based care provider.

　　A children's services agency may take the form of an enterprise (e.g. private long day care centre), body (e.g. family day care scheme), organisation (e.g. community association), or individual (e.g. licensed home-based care provider).

　　A children's services agency is only included in the Children's Services NMDS if it is funded and/or licensed by a government(s) to provide at least one children's service.

# Outlet—children's services

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*  DATA CONCEPT

*Definition:*  The organisational unit which delivers a children's service.

*Context:*  This data concept is used in order to obtain a more detailed appraisal of service availability and how services are provided. The 'outlet' is the level at which data is collected and reported for the Children's Services NMDS. Therefore, 'outlet' is the counting unit, irrespective of whether or not it is the same as the usual site of the children's services agency.

## Relational attributes

*Related data:*  Is used in conjunction with: 'Service delivery setting', 'Agency—children's services' and 'Type of service—children's services'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*  Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*  A children's services outlet typically takes the form of a centre (e.g. private long day care centre, dedicated preschool, etc.). An outlet can also be an individual (e.g. family day care provider or licensed home-based care provider), or one of the various settings that a mobile children's service can visit.

A children's services outlet is only included in the Children's Services NMDS if it is funded and/or licensed by a government(s) to provide at least one children's service.

# Outlet identifier

*Admin. status:*　　　　DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*　　COMPOSITE DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*　　　　　Identifier for an outlet in which services are delivered to children.

*Context:*　　　　　　The outlet is the unit of organisation closest to the delivery of services to children.

　　　　　　　　　　Each separately identifiable outlet to have a unique identifier at the national level.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*　　　　*Numeric*　　　　　*Representational form:* CODE

*Field size:*　　　　*Min.* 8　*Max.* 8　　*Representational layout:* NNNNNNNN

*Data domain:*　　　Concatenation of:

　　　　　　　　　　N — State identifier

　　　　　　　　　　NNNNN — Agency number

　　　　　　　　　　NN — Outlet number

*Guide for use:*　　The agency number is a unique number allocated to an individual agency within a State or Territory. An agency may have more than one outlet. The outlet number is a unique number allocated to an individual outlet of an agency.

　　　　　　　　　　In cases where the agency is *not* an outlet, the outlet number is 00. In cases where the agency is *also* the outlet, the outlet number is 01.

　　　　　　　　　　If data is supplied electronically, this item is only required once in the header information. If information is supplied manually, this item should be provided on each form submitted.

*Collection methods:*　Allocation of the outlet identifier should be undertaken by the responsible program area of the relevant jurisdiction.

*Related data:*　　　Is used in conjunction with 'Outlet—children's services' and 'Agency—children's services'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*    National Health Data Dictionary, Version 8.0, 1999.

*Source organisation:*    National Health Data Committee.

*Comments:*    Currently, there is no uniform method throughout community services for the identification of agencies or outlets. However, adoption of consistent practices for allocating unique agency or outlet identifiers has the potential to enhance data comparability and utility.

It is important to note that if agencies and outlets are to communicate confidentially between one another, a unique agency identity and a unique outlet identity needs to be established. ````````

# Service delivery setting

**Identifying and definitional attributes**

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The type of physical setting of an outlet in which a children's service is delivered. |
| *Context:* | This element is used, in conjunction with other data elements relating to service provision, to obtain a more detailed appraisal of service availability and how services are provided. At the broadest level, this data element provides a measure of the extent to which services are provided to children in a home-based, centre-based, or mobile setting. |

**Relational and representational attributes**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1   *Max.* 1 | *Representational layout:* | N |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data domain:* | Centre-based |
| | Home-based |
| | Mobile |
| | 9.  Not stated/inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | A centre-based setting is a building or buildings where a children's service is delivered and the primary function is non-residential. For example, a child care centre, dedicated preschool, community centre, school, etc. |
| | A home-based setting is a private home where a children's service is delivered. For example: a family day care provider's house, licensed home-based carer's private home, etc. |
| | A mobile children's service would usually operate at various general community settings. For example: a street, park, community hall, library, etc. |
| | It is possible that mobile children's services may operate from both centre-based and home-based settings. They are included as a separate data domain due to the variability of their delivery settings. |
| *Collection methods:* | To be collected and reported for all children's services outlets, with the exception of family day care schemes where the service delivery setting should be reported as home-based care, even though the family day care scheme's administrative centre may be located in a centre-based setting. |

| *Related data:* | Is used in conjunction with 'Outlet—children's services', 'Agency—children's services' and 'Type of service—children's services'. |

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*    Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Address

*Admin. status:*      DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | COMPOSITE DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | A location at which a children's service may be delivered. |
| *Context:* | Required for primary collection to facilitate contact with the client, person or service provider. |

May also be used to map to the ABS Australian Standard Geographical Classifications (ASGC) using the National Localities Index (also produced by the ABS). This information can then be used to compare aggregate data to other information of an SLA basis for example. Similarly postcode can be obtained from Address for comparison with other information available on a postcode basis.

See Information Annex for further details regarding Geographical Indicators.

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | | | *Representational form:* |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* | *Max.* | *Representational layout:* |
| *Data domain:* | Concatenation of: | | |
| | Unit number | | |
| | Number | | |
| | Street | | |
| | City/Town | | |
| | State/Territory | | |
| | Postcode | | |
| | Country | | |
| *Guide for use:* | Number can refer to a street number, lot number or RMB (roadside mailbox) number. | | |
| *Collection methods:* | An outlet is to report its physical location. They should not report a post office box number. | | |
| *Related data:* | 'Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification'. | | |
| | 'Geographical location—SLA'. | | |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | National Health Data Dictionary, Version 8.0, 1999. |
| *Source organisation:* | National Health Data Committee. |

*Comments:*         A complete implementation of 'Address', including the related data elements, is currently under development in coordination with Standards Australia, ABS, NHDC and the NCSDC.

# Geographical location—SLA

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*  DERIVED DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*  Geographical location according to State/Territory and statistical local area (SLA).

*Context:*  To enable the analysis of service provision in relation to demographic and other characteristics of the population of a geographic area.

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 5   *Max.* 5 | *Representational layout:* | NNNNN |

*Data domain:*  The geographical location is reported using a five digit numerical code to indicate the Statistical Local Area (SLA) within the reporting State or Territory, as defined in the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ABS 1995)

*Guide for use:*  The Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) is updated on an annual basis with a date of effect of 1 July each year. Therefore, the edition effective for the data collection reference year should be used.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Localities Index (NLI) can be used to assign each locality or address in Australia to an SLA. The NLI is a comprehensive list of localities in Australia with their full code (including SLA) from the main structure of the ASGC.

For the majority of localities, the locality name (suburb or town, for example) is sufficient to assign an SLA. However, some localities have the same name. For most of these, limited additional information such as the postcode or State can be used with the locality name to assign the SLA.

In addition, other localities cross one or more SLA boundaries and are referred to as split localities. For these, the more detailed information of the number and street of the establishment is used with the Streets Sub-index of the NLI to assign the SLA.

*Collection methods:*  The address of an outlet from which 'Geographical location—SLA' is derived should be recorded in line with the specifications detailed in the data element 'Address'.

*Related data:*  This data element is derived from the data element 'Address'.

Is related to 'Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification'.

**Administrative attributes**

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | Australian Standard Geographical Classification, 1995. |
| *Source organisation:* | Australian Bureau of Statistics. |
| *Comments:* | The geographical location does not provide direct information on the geographical catchment area or catchment population of the outlet. |

# Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification

*Admin. status:*          DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DERIVED DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | Geographical location according to the Rural Remote and Metropolitan Area (RRMA) classification. |
| *Context:* | To enable the analysis of service provision in relation to demographic and other population characteristics of a geographical area. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1   *Max.* 1 | *Representational layout:* | N |

*Data domain:*     The geographical location is reported using a one digit numerical code to indicate the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area (RRMA) classification of the outlet's Statistical Local Area (SLA). See below:

1. Capital city
2. Other metropolitan centre
3. Large rural centre
4. Small rural centre
5. Other rural area
6. Remote centre
7. Other remote area
9. Not stated/inadequately described

*Guide for use:*     The address of an outlet from which 'Rural/remote/metropolitan area classification' is derived should be recorded in line with the specifications detailed in the data element 'Address'.

*Collection methods:*

*Related data:*     This data element is derived from the derived data element 'Geographical location—SLA', which in turn is derived from the data element 'Address'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*     Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification 1991 Census Edition, 1994.

*Source organisation:*     Department of Primary Industries and Energy and Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.

*Comments:*

# Type of service—children's services

*Admin. status:*          DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*      DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*             The type(s) of care and developmental activities that an outlet is licensed and/or funded to provide to children in a reference week.

*Context:*                To enable the analysis of service provision.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*               Numeric                    *Representational form:*    CODE

*Field size:*             *Min.* 1   *Max.* 8        *Representational layout:* NNNNNNNN

*Data domain:*            1.   Long day care

                    1.1 Long day care care excluding family day care

                    1.2 Long day care, family day

        2.   Preschool

        3.   Occasional care

        4.   Before school care

        5.   After school care

        6.   Vacation care

        7.   Toy library

        8.   Playcentre/Playschool/Playgroup

        9.   Not stated/inadequately described

An outlet may provide one or more of the above types of service (see definition of types of service in the Information Annexe). An outlet should indicate which type(s) of service it is funded and/or licensed to provide during a reference week. For example, an outlet funded and licensed to provide long day care, occasional care and after school care would be coded 1,3,5.

*Collection methods:*

*Related data:*           Is used in conjunction with 'Outlet—children's services' and 'Service delivery setting'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*        Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000.

*Source organisation:*    Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*

# Place—children's services

*Admin. status:*          DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*      DATA CONCEPT

*Definition:*             A unit of service that can be used by a child at a given time.

*Context:*                This data concept is used in order to gain a greater understanding of patterns of service delivery. Outlet capacity is usually measured in terms of places. The term 'place' can be defined as the unit of measurement for the capacity of an outlet to provide a type of children's service. A 'place' may be licensed, approved for funding, or both licensed and approved funding. Thus, an outlet's number of licensed places is equivalent to the maximum number of children the outlet is licensed to have in care at a given time, while an outlet's number of places approved for funding is equivalent to the maximum number of children in care at a given time who are eligible for government funding.

In some jurisdictions, preschool services are not funded and/or licensed in terms of 'places'. Therefore, the number of enrolments is used as a proxy for the number of places in preschool services.

In some cases, the concept of a 'place' may also vary for the same type of service between jurisdictions. Therefore, it is not always possible to compare places between types of services, or for the same type of service across jurisdictions. For example, jurisdictions differ in their methods of defining occasional care places approved for funding.

## Relational attributes

*Related data:*           Used in conjunction with 'Place—status'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*        Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000.

*Source organisation:*    Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*

# Place—status

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*  DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*  Whether or not a 'place' in an outlet is licensed and/or approved for funding by government.

*Context:*  This data element helps in gaining a greater understanding of outlet capacity.

The number of licensed places in a children's services outlet indicates the maximum number of children allowed by regulation to attend at any one time.

Where an outlet has both licensed places and places approved for funding, the number of licensed places may not be equal to the number of places approved for funding.

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1  *Max.* 3 | *Representational layout:* | NNN |

*Data domain:*
1. Services other than preschools:

    1.1  Approved for funding (not licensed)

    1.2  Licensed (not approved for funding)

    1.3  Approved for funding and licensed

    1.4  Neither approved for funding nor licensed

2. Preschool services:

    2.1  Enrolled

3. Family day care

    3.1 Equivalent full time (EFT)

9. Not stated/inadequately described

| *Guide for use:* | 1. Services other than preschools: |
| | |

*Guide for use:*
1. Services other than preschools:

   1.1  A place approved for the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit and/or other State/Territory government funding.

   1.2  A place authorised by State/Territory government according to regulations specific to the provision of children's services.

   1.3  A place that is both approved for government funding and licensed according to government regulations.

   1.4  A place that is neither approved for government funding nor licensed according to government regulations.

2. Preschool services:

Due to the nature of preschool services, the number of children enrolled in the reference week is to be used as a proxy for the number of places. Therefore:

   2.1  An enrolment where a child appears on the register of a preschool class.

3. Family day care

In services provided in a family day care setting the equivalent full time (EFT) is used to indicate the number of funded places.

   3.1 Equivalent full time (EFT) indicate a place that is approved for funding in a family day care setting.

*Collection methods:*
This data element is not relevant for licensed home-based carers, toy libraries or playgroups.

For the purposes of the Children's Services NMDS, family day care schemes should only report the number of places approved for funding (i.e. categories 1.1 and 1.3 in the data domain).

Outlets should report their total number of places (or enrolments) in each of the above categories. **In instances where licensing regulations vary by type of service, an outlet should report the number of licensed places for each type of service.**

If jurisdictions desire, they may request that outlets collect the number of licensed places according to age group. However, this level of detail is not required for the NMDS.

*Related data:*
Is used in conjunction with 'Place—children's services'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*
Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000.

*Source organisation:*
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*
There are outstanding issues regarding the method of counting places at occasional care services, and this will need further development in the future.

# Weeks of operation—per year

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*Admin. status:*        DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The reported number of weeks per year that the outlet is open for children to use services. |
| *Context:* | Indicator of availability of services. |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of patterns of service delivery, particularly when collected in conjunction with the derived data elements 'Service availability—hours per day', 'Service availability—days per week', and 'Service availability—hours per week'. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric     *Representational form*: QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 2   *Max.* 2     *Representational layout:* NN |
| *Data domain:* | The number of weeks within which the outlet operates per year. |
| | Valid numbers are |
| | 01 to 52 and |
| | 99  Not stated/inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | A week is measured from 12:00AM (midnight) Monday morning to 11:59PM the following Sunday. If an outlet operates within this period then it is counted as having operated during that week. Therefore if an outlet operates for only a short time for one of the days within a week, it is counted as operating during that week. |
| | This element should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. |
| *Collection methods:* | An outlet should report the number of weeks in a full year it is open for children to use at least one funded and/or licensed children's service. |
| | New outlets should count the number of weeks that the outlet plans to operate in a full year. |
| | This data element is not relevant for family day care or licensed home-based care. |
| *Related data:* | 'Service availability—weekly', |
| | 'Service availability—hours per day', |
| | 'Service availability—hours per week', |
| | 'Service availability—days per week'. |

**Administrative attributes**

*Source document:*   National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 2.0, 2000.

*Source organisation:*   Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*

# Service availability—weekly

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The opening and closing times for each day that an outlet is open for children to use services in a reference week. |
| *Context:* | Indicator of availability of services. |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of patterns of service delivery, particularly when collected in conjunction with 'Type of service—children's services'. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric  *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 4  *Max.* 4  *Representational layout:* HHMM |
| *Data domain:* | Respondents should use a 12-hour clock with am and pm suffixes. |
| | Responses range from 1200am to 1159pm |
| | 9999 Not stated/Inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | Round to the nearest quarter of an hour. |
| *Collection methods:* | Outlets providing preschool services should report the times that an outlet is open for children to attend, not the hours per day entitlement for an individual child. |
| | This data element does not include times when staff are working at an outlet but the outlet is not open for children to use services, such as when staff are planning programs, preparing for children's arrival or consulting parents. |
| | Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. |
| | This data element is not relevant for family day care or licensed home-based care. |
| *Related data:* | 'Service availability—hours per day', |
| | 'Service availability—days per week', |
| | 'Service availability—hours per week'. |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000. |
| *Source organisation:* | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. |
| *Comments:* | |

# Service availability—hours per day

*Admin. status:*      DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DERIVED DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The number of hours per day that an outlet is open for children to use services. |
| *Context:* | Indicator of availability of services. |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of patterns of service delivery, particularly when collected in conjunction with 'Type of service—children's services'. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric      *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 2   *Max.* 3      *Representational layout:* NN.N |
| *Data domain:* | Number of hours per day represented in decimal format. Round to nearest half-hour. |
| | Valid numbers are 0.0 to 24.0 |
| | 999   Not stated/ inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | This data element is derived from the hours reported by the outlet in line with the specifications detailed in 'Service availability—weekly'. |
| *Collection methods:* | This data element is not relevant for family day care or licensed home-based care. |
| *Related data:* | This data element is derived from 'Service availability—weekly'. |
| | Is related to 'Service availability—days per week', and 'Service availability—hours per week'. |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000. |
| *Source organisation:* | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. |
| *Comments:* | |

# Service availability—days per week

*Admin. status:* DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DERIVED DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The number of days per week that an outlet is open for children to use services. |
| *Context:* | Indicator of availability of services. |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of patterns of service delivery, particularly when collected in conjunction with 'Type of service—children's services'. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric    *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1   *Max.* 1    *Representational layout:* N |
| *Data domain:* | Whole number of days (no fractions or decimals) |
| | Valid numbers are 0 to 7 |
| | 9   Not stated/ inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | This data element is derived from the hours reported by the outlet in line with the specifications detailed in 'Service availability—weekly'. |
| *Collection methods:* | This derived data element is not relevant for family day care or licensed home-based care. |
| *Related data:* | This data element is derived from 'Service availability—weekly.' |
| | Is related to 'Service availability—hours per day', and 'Service availability—hours per week'. |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000. |
| *Source organisation:* | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. |
| *Comments:* | |

# Service availability—hours per week

*Admin. status:*        DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DERIVED DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The number of hours per week that an outlet is open for children to use services. |
| *Context:* | Indicator of availability of services. |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of patterns of service delivery, particularly when collected in conjunction with 'Type of service—children's services'. |

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*        Numeric        *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*        *Min.* 1   *Max.* 3        *Representational layout:* NNN

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data domain:* | Number of hours per week in whole hours. |
| | Valid numbers are 000 to 168 |
| | 999   Not stated/ inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | This data element is derived from the hours reported by the outlet in line with the specifications detailed in 'Service availability— weekly'. |
| *Collection methods:* | This derived data element is not relevant for family day care or licensed home-based care. |
| *Related data:* | This data element is derived from 'Service availability—weekly'. |
| | Is related to 'Service availability—hours per day', and 'Service availability—days per week'. |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000. |
| *Source organisation:* | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. |
| *Comments:* | |

# Child Care Benefit—status

*Admin. status:*        DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | Whether or not a type of children's service provided by an outlet is approved for the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit. |
| *Context:* | To assist in analysis of children's services financing/funding. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1  *Max.* 1 | *Representational layout:* | N |

*Data domain:*        1 Approved for Child Care Benefit

2 Not Approved for Child Care Benefit

9 Not stated/Inadequately described

*Guide for use:*        This item is to determine whether a type of service is approved for the Child Care Benefit, regardless of whether or not any children using the type of service are eligible to receive the benefit.

A type of service registered, but not approved for the Child Care Benefit would be in category 2 above.

*Collection methods:*        Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*        Children's Services Data Working Group

*Comments:*

# Fee period—children's services

*Admin. status:* DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:* DATA CONCEPT

*Definition:* A set length of time for which an outlet charges a fee for a type of children's service.

*Context:* This data concept is used in order to gain a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services. Information on the length of a 'Fee period', combined with information on the fee charged in a fee period, can be used to obtain maximum and minimum hourly fees.

## Relational attributes

*Related data:* Is used in conjunction with 'Longest fee period' and 'Shortest fee period'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:* Children's Services Data Working Group

*Comments:*

# Shortest fee period

*Admin. status:* DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:* DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:* The shortest length of time for which an outlet charges a fee for a children's service.

*Context:* To assist in analysis of children's services financing/funding.

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1 *Max.* 1 | *Representational layout:* | N |

*Data domain:*
1. Hour
2. Session
3. Day
4. Week
5. Term
6. Year
7. Other (specify)
8. Not stated/Inadequately described

*Guide for use:* An outlet should report the shortest length of time for which a fee is charged for a type of children's service. The standard fee schedule of an outlet should be used to obtain the shortest fee period.

*Collection methods:* Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:* Is used in conjunction with 'Maximum fee in shortest fee period'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:* Children's Services Data Working Group

*Comments:*

# Hours in shortest fee period

*Admin. status:*      DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The number of hours in the shortest period for which an outlet charges a fee for a children's service. |
| *Context:* | Service provision and planning: |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric      *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 2   *Max.* 5      *Representational layout:* NNNN.N |
| *Data domain:* | Round to nearest half-hour and represent in decimal format. |
| | Valid numbers are 0.5 to 9998.5 |
| | 99999 Not stated/inadequately described |
| *Guide for use:* | An outlet should specify the number of hours in the shortest fee period, based on the outlet's standard fee periods. For example, the shortest period for which an outlet offering before school care charges a fee, may be a session of 1.5 hours. However, the shortest fee period for an outlet offering long day care may be a week consisting of 40.0 hours. |
| *Collection methods:* | Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. |
| *Related data:* | Used in conjunction with 'Maximum fee in shortest fee period' to derive 'Maximum hourly fee'. |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | |
| *Source organisation:* | Children's Services Data Working Group. |
| *Comments:* | |

# Maximum fee in shortest fee period

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*  DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*  The maximum fee charged by an outlet for the shortest length of time for which a fee is charged.

*Context:*  Service provision and planning:

This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*  Numeric  *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*  *Min.* 3  *Max.* 6  *Representational layout:*  $$$$.¢¢

*Data domain:*  The fee charged for a given period in dollars and cents.

*Guide for use:*  An outlet should report the maximum fee for the shortest period for which a fee is charged for a children's service.

The shortest fee period may be an hour, session, day, week, term, or other.

Where fees vary by age group of children, an outlet should report the maximum fee for the age group attracting the highest charge.

*Collection methods:*  Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

Outlets should report their 'standard' fee.

The following should be excluded from the reported fee:

- fee relief
- sliding scales for families
- administrative levies
- voluntary levies paid by parents
- optional charges for service components such as nappy supplies and meals
- any other discounts.

*Related data:*  Used in conjunction with 'Hours in shortest fee period' to derive 'Maximum hourly fee'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*  Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Maximum hourly fee

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*  DERIVED DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*  The maximum fee per hour charged by an outlet for children to use services.

*Context:*  Service provision and planning:

This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*  Numeric  *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*  *Min.* 3  *Max.* 4  *Representational layout:*  $$.¢¢

*Data domain:*  To be represented in dollars and cents.

*Guide for use:*  Derived by dividing 'Maximum fee in shortest fee period' by 'Hours in shortest fee period'. **It is possible for the maximum hourly fee to be the same as the minimum hourly fee for services that do not vary their fees according to the length of time (period).**

*Collection methods:*  Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*  Is derived from 'Maximum fee in shortest fee period' and 'Hours in shortest fee period'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*  Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Longest fee period

*Admin. status:* DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:* DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:* The greatest length of time for which an outlet charges a fee for a children's service.

*Context:* To assist in analysis of children's services financing/funding.

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1   *Max.* 1 | *Representational layout:* | N |

*Data domain:*
1. Hour
2. Session
3. Day
4. Week
5. Term
6. Year
7. Other (specify)
8. Not stated/Inadequately described

*Guide for use:* An outlet should report the greatest length of time for which a fee is charged for a type of children's service. The standard fee schedule of an outlet should be used to obtain the longest fee period.

*Collection methods:* Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:* Is used in conjunction with 'Minimum fee in longest fee period' and 'Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:* Children's Services Data Working Group

*Comments:*

# Hours in longest fee period

*Admin. status:* DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:* DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:* The number of hours in the longest period for which an outlet charges a fee for a children's service.

*Context:* Service provision and planning:

This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:* Numeric *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:* *Min.* 2 *Max.* 5 *Representational layout:* NNNN.N

*Data domain:* Round to nearest half-hour and represent in decimal format.

Valid numbers are 0.5 to 9998.5

99999 Not stated/inadequately described

*Guide for use:* An outlet should specify the number of hours in the longest fee period, based on the outlet's standard fee periods. For example, the longest fee period for which an outlet offering long day care charges a fee, may be a week consisting of 50.0 hours. However, the longest fee period for preschool may be a term of 105.0 hours.

*Collection methods:* Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:* Used in conjunction with 'Minimum fee in longest fee period' to derive 'Minimum hourly fee'.

Also used in conjunction with 'Minimum fee in the longest fee period less government fee relief' to derive 'Minimum hourly fee less government fee relief'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:* Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Minimum fee in longest fee period

*Admin. status:*         DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The minimum fee charged for a type of service for the longest length of time for which a fee is charged. |
| *Context:* | Service provision and planning: |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric     *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 3   *Max.* 6     *Representational layout:*  $$$$. ¢¢ |
| *Data domain:* | The fee charged for a given period in dollars and cents. |
| *Guide for use:* | An outlet should report the minimum fee for the longest period for which a fee is charged for a children's service. |
| | Where fees vary by age group of children, an outlet should report the minimum fee for the age group attracting the lowest charge. |
| *Collection methods:* | Should be collected for each service type an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. |
| | Outlets should report their 'standard' fee. |
| | The following should be excluded from the reported fee: |

- fee relief
- sliding scales for families
- administrative levies
- voluntary levies paid by parents
- optional charges for service components such as nappy supplies and meals
- any other discounts.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Related data:* | Used in conjunction with 'Hours in longest fee period' to derive 'Minimum hourly fee'. |
| | Used in conjunction with ' Amount of fee relief in the longest fee period to derive 'Minimum fee in the longest fee period less government relief' |

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*    Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Minimum hourly fee

*Admin. status:*          DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*      DERIVED DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*      The minimum fee per hour charged for a type of service for children to use services.

*Context:*      Service provision and planning:

This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*      Numeric      *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*      *Min.* 3  *Max.* 4      *Representational layout:*  $$. ¢¢

*Data domain:*      To be represented in dollars and cents.

*Guide for use:*      Derived by dividing 'Minimum fee in longest fee period' by 'Hours in longest fee period'.

*Collection methods:*      Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*      Is derived from 'Minimum fee in longest fee period' and 'Hours in longest fee period'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*      Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Amount of fee relief available in longest fee period

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The maximum amount of government-provided fee relief available in the longest fee period for a type of service. |
| *Context:* | Service provision and planning: |
| | This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 3  *Max.* 5 | *Representational layout:* | $$$. ¢¢ |
| *Data domain:* | To be represented in dollars and cents. | | |

*Guide for use:*  The amount of government-provided fee relief available to a child using a type of service for the longest period for which a fee is charged.

The maximum amount of fee relief should be used in the calculation of this data element, regardless of whether or not any children using the type of service are eligible for this fee relief. This data will be obtained from administrative records

The longest fee period may be an hour, session, day, week, term, year, or other.

Government-provided fee relief includes:

- Commonwealth Childcare Benefit (for approved services only)

- State Government fee relief

Government-provided fee relief, as defined in this data element, does not include the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit where a service is **registered** for the payment. For example, children attending a preschool in Victoria may be eligible for State government fee relief, and the service may be registered for the Child Care Benefit. A respondent calculating this element should only include State fee relief to obtain the total amount of fee relief available.

Different rates of fee relief may apply to different types of services; for example, Commonwealth Child Care Benefit is available at different rates for under school-age children and school-age children. This should be noted when reporting the element for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Collection methods:* | Should be obtained from administrative records for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. |
| *Related data:* | Is used in conjunction with 'Fees in the longest fee period' to derive 'Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief' |

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:* Children's Services Data Working Group

*Comments:*

# Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief

*Admin. status:*          DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*     DERIVED DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*            The minimum fee charged for a type of service for the longest length of time for which a fee is charged minus government fee relief.

*Context:*               Service provision and planning:

This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*       Numeric        *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*     *Min.* 3  *Max.* 6        *Representational layout:* $$$$. ¢¢

*Data domain:*    To be represented in dollars and cents.

*Guide for use:*  Derived by subtracting ' Amount of fee relief available in the longest fee period' from ' Minimum fee in the longest fee period'

*Collection methods:* Should be collected for each service type an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*   Is derived from 'Amount of fee relief available in longest fee period' and 'Fee in longest fee period'. Used in conjunction with 'Hours in longest fee period' to derive 'Minimum hourly fee less government relief'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*   Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Minimum hourly fee less government fee relief

*Admin. status:*          DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*      DERIVED DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*             The minimum fee per hour charged for a type of service, minus government fee relief.

*Context:*                Service provision and planning:

This item helps in gaining a greater understanding of the affordability of children's services.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*          Numeric          *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*        *Min.* 3   *Max.* 4          *Representational layout:* $$. ¢¢

*Data domain:*       To be represented in dollars and cents.

*Guide for use:*     Derived by dividing 'Minimum fee in longest fee period less government relief' by 'Hours in longest fee period'.

*Collection methods:* Should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*      Is derived from 'Minimum fee in longest fee period less government fee relief' and 'Hours in longest fee period'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*    Children's Services Data Working Group.

*Comments:*

# Child–children's services

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA CONCEPT |
| *Definition:* | A person, generally aged 0–12 years, who uses a children's service. |
| *Context:* | Information about the number and characteristics of children using children's services assists in the analyses of patterns of utilisation. |
| | For services other than preschools, this data concept includes all children occupying a place in a children's services outlet. At times, a place may be occupied by a child who is not in attendance in a reference week. This includes a place that has been paid for where a child is absent. |
| | For preschool services, this data concept includes children enrolled in that service, whether or not they are in attendance. |

## Relational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Related data:* | Is used in conjunction with 'Age of child', 'Indigenous status' and 'Use of Services-hours'. |

## Administrative attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Source document:* | Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections, 2000. |
| *Source organisation:* | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. |
| *Comments:* | |

# Age of child

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The age of a child in (completed) years at a reference date. |
| *Context:* | Socio-demographic indicator. |
| | The data element 'age' is used in the analyses of service utilisation by age group and comparisons with demographic statistics. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | QUANTATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1  *Max.* 3 | *Representational layout:* | NNN |

*Data domain:*       Age in single years (if aged less than one year old, record as zero).

0. Children aged less than 1 year
1. Children aged 1 year
2. Children aged 2 years
3. Children aged 3 years
4. Children aged 4 years
5. Children aged 5 years
6. Children aged 6 years
7. Children aged 7 years
8. Children aged 8 years
9. Children aged 9 years
10. Children aged 10 years
11. Children aged 11 years
12. Children aged 12 years
13. Children aged 13 years and over
99. Not stated/inadequately described

*Guide for use:*      An outlet should use the above definition to record the number of children in a specified age group using at least one funded and/or licensed children's service in a reference week.

If year of birth is known (but date of birth is not), use the date, 0101YYYY of the birth year to estimate age (where YYYY is the year of birth). If age (or date of birth) is unknown or not stated, and cannot be estimated, use code 99 'Not stated/inadequately described'.

| *Collection methods:* | This element should be collected for children attending each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. Children attending services that are both unfunded and unlicensed should be excluded. |
|---|---|
| | For outlets providing more than one type of service, this data element should be collected for the total number of children who attended at least one funded and/or licensed service at the outlet, as well as each individual type of service. |
| | Note that the two totals may not be the same, since any one child may attend more than one type of licensed and/or funded service provided by the outlet (e.g. before school care and after school care). |
| | This is important in order to identify multiple service use. |
| *Related data:* | Is used in conjunction with 'Type of service—children's services' and 'Child—children's services'. |

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*  Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*  Although collection of date of birth allows more precise calculation of age, the children's services NMDS does not include unit-record data for children using services.

# Indigenous status

*Admin. status:*        DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*    DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*           An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.

*Context:*              Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occupy a unique place in Australian society and culture. In the current climate of reconciliation, accurate and consistent statistics about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are required to monitor changes in wellbeing and to account for government expenditure in this area.

## Relational and representational attributes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric | *Representational form:* | CODE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1  *Max.* 3 | *Representational layout:* | NNN |

*Data domain:*
1.   Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander origin
2.   Torres Strait Islander but not Aboriginal origin
3.   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin
4.   Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander origin
9.   Not stated/inadequately described.

*Guide for use:*        There are three components to the definition:
- descent;
- self-identification; and
- community acceptance.

The classification for 'Indigenous Status' has a hierarchical structure comprising two levels. There are four categories at the detailed level of the classification which are grouped into two categories at the broad level. There is one supplementary category for 'not stated' responses. The classification is as follows:

**Indigenous**
- Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander Origin
- Torres Strait Islander but not Aboriginal Origin
- Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Origin

**Non-Indigenous**
- Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander Origin

**Not Stated**

This category is not to be available as a valid answer to the questions but is intended for use:

- primarily when importing data from other data collections that do not contain mappable data;
- where an answer was refused; or
- where the question was not able to be asked prior to completion of assistance because the parent was unable to communicate or a person who knows the child's Indigenous status was not available.

Only in the last two situations may the tick boxes on the questionaire be left blank.

*Collection methods:*    The standard question for Indigenous Status is as follows:

[Is the child] [Is (name)] of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

(For persons of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, mark both 'Yes' boxes.)

No..................................................................☐

Yes, Aboriginal.............................................☐

Yes, Torres Strait Islander..........................☐

This question is recommended for self-enumerated or interview-based collections. It can also be used in circumstances where a close relative, friend, or another member of the household is answering on behalf of the subject.

When the parent is not present, the person answering for them should be in a position to do so, i.e. this person must know the child about whom the question is being asked well and feel confident to provide accurate information about them. However, it is strongly recommended that this question be asked directly of the parent wherever possible.

This question should always be asked even if the child does not 'look' Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The Indigenous Status question allows for more than one response. The procedure for coding multiple responses is as follows:

If the respondent marks 'No' and either 'Aboriginal' or 'Torres Strait Islander', then the response should be coded to either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as indicated (i.e. disregard the 'No' response).

If the respondent marks both the 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander' boxes, then their response should be coded to 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Origin'.

If the respondent marks all three boxes ('No', 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander'), then the response should be coded to 'Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Origin' (i.e. disregard the 'No' response).

An outlet should count each child according to their Indigenous status and sum to derive numbers in each of the following categories: Indigenous, Non-Indigenous, or Not stated/inadequately described.

This element should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*     Is used in conjunction with 'Child—children's services'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*     Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity, 1999.

*Source organisation:*     Australian Bureau of Statistics.

*Comments:*

# Use of services—hours

*Admin. status:*      DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*    DATA ELEMENT

*Definition:*    The pattern of service use (hours) of all children using at least one children's service during a reference week.

*Context:*    Service and resource planning:

Is used in the analyses of the utilisation of service provision and outlet requirements.

## Relational and representational attributes

*Datatype:*    Numeric    *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE

*Field size:*    *Min.* 3  *Max.* 3    *Representational layout:* NNN

*Data domain:*
1. Less than 3 hours per week;
2. 3 hours to 5 hours per week;
3. 6 hours to 11 hours per week;
4. 12 hours to 19 hours per week;
5. 20 hours to 29 hours per week;
6. 30 hours to 39 hours per week;
7. 40 or more hours per week;
9. Not stated/inadequately described.

*Guide for use:*    Round to nearest hour.

An outlet should count each child's hours of attendance in a reference week and sum to derive the total number of children in each category.

Hours of attendance includes those hours where a child is absent but their place has been paid for.

*Collection methods:*    This element should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide.

*Related data:*    Used in conjunction with 'Type of service—children's services'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*

*Source organisation:*    Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*

# Worker—children's services

*Admin. status:*      DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

*Data element type:*      DATA CONCEPT

*Definition:*      A person working on either a paid or unpaid basis in a children's services outlet.

*Context:*      Information about workers in children's services outlets assists in the analyses of the resources available to children attending these services. The concept is defined broadly to include both paid (including contract workers) and unpaid workers (including volunteers). It includes all workers, regardless of the type of contact they have with children (including those with no direct contact). This recognises the contribution of all workers in delivering children's services.

## Relational attributes

*Related data:*      Used in conjunction with 'Qualification status—paid primary contact worker'.

## Administrative attributes

*Source document:*      Comparison of data items in selected children's services, 2000.

*Source organisation:*      Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

*Comments:*

# Qualification status–paid primary contact worker

*Admin. status:*  DRAFT

## Identifying and definitional attributes

*Version number:* 1

| | |
|---|---|
| *Data element type:* | DATA ELEMENT |
| *Definition:* | The extent to which a paid primary contact worker has attained knowledge and skills relevant to the children's services field which have resulted in a formal qualification. |
| *Context:* | To assist in the analyses of the resource use and activity of children's services outlets. |

## Relational and representational attributes

| | |
|---|---|
| *Datatype:* | Numeric       *Representational form:* QUANTITATIVE VALUE |
| *Field size:* | *Min.* 1   *Max.* 2       *Representational layout:* NN |
| *Data domain:* | 1.  Relevant formal qualification(s) |
| | 2.  Currently undertaking relevant qualification(s) |
| | 3.  No relevant formal qualification |
| | 9.  Not stated/inadequately described. |
| *Guide for use:* | 1.  A worker who currently has at least one of the following qualifications: Teaching (Early childhood or primary), Nursing (including Mothercraft nursing), Child care certificate/Associate diploma (2 years), Diploma or degree in child care (3 years or more), other qualifications relevant to children's services (for example, psychology and social work). |
| | 2.  A worker who is currently undertaking at least one of the above qualifications. |
| | 3.  A worker who does not have one of the above qualifications. |

An outlet should use the above definition to record the number of paid primary contact workers in each qualification category working in at least one funded and/or licensed children's service in a reference week. A Basic Child Care Certificate (1 year) is not recognised as a formal qualification by some jurisdictions and is therefore not to be included in categories 1 and 2 above.

A primary contact worker is a worker who has direct contact with children receiving services.

A paid worker is a worker who receives wages or salary for the work they perform in a children's services outlet. This includes contract workers where the contract is for the supply of labour e.g. direct child care. A worker that receives in-kind benefits such as free child care and/or free meals is not considered a 'paid worker'.

| *Collection methods:* | This data element should be collected for each type of service an outlet is funded and/or licensed to provide. |
|---|---|
| *Related data:* | Used in conjunction with 'Worker–children's services'. |

## Administrative attributes

| *Source document:* | Data Collection Manual: Children's Services. SCRCSSP Productivity Commission, 1999. |
|---|---|
| *Source organisation:* | Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision. Productivity Commission. |
| *Comments:* | |

# 5   Information annexe

## Type of Service Definitions

### Long day care

Care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age which are provided for at least 8 hours a day, on normal working days, at least 48 weeks of the year. Children may use the service either full-time or part-time.

### Occasional care

Care and developmental activities for children primarily under school age on a non-regular basis, normally for short periods of time. Adjunct care is included in this definition of occasional care.

### Outside school hours care services

Care and developmental activities provided to children of primary school age out of school hours. The term covers before/after school care services and vacation care services.

#### Before/after school care services

Services providing care and developmental activities provided for primary school age children on school days at times (e.g. before school, after school, and/or 'pupil-free' days) when school is not in session.

#### Vacation care services

Care and developmental activities provided for school age children during school vacation periods.

### Preschool services

Educational and developmental services provided to children in the year (or, in some jurisdictions, two years) before they begin full-time primary education[5]. An appropriately qualified teacher runs preschool services. (For more information about educational programs for children before entry into Year 1, see *Australia's Welfare 1999*)

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[5] Full-time primary education is pre-Year 1 in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, and Year 1 in Queensland and Western Australia.

## Toy libraries

Toy libraries provide a toy lending service for families with young children. Some toy libraries lend to other children's services such as family day care homes, child care centres and preschools. Advice is given on the developmental stage suitability of the toys and games provided for the children. Some toy libraries are mobile and serve remote and Aboriginal communities or under-resourced communities. Toy libraries are included in the scope of the NMDS only if they operate in conjunction with another funded and/or licensed children's service.

## Playgroups

Playgroups are designed to bring together, on a regular basis, groups of children under school age with their parents or carers for informal or semi-structured sessions. Playgroups are generally run by parents, and are organised in different ways according to community needs. Playgroups are included in the scope of the NMDS only if they operate in conjunction with another funded and/or licensed children's service.

## Play centres (South Australia)

Play centres are for children up to 5 years old, living in rural areas with no access to any other children's service. There are usually one or two sessions per week and the focus of the program is social development through play. Some play centres also provide limited respite and occasional care. The centres are staffed by a play centre leader and have a high level of parent involvement. They are managed by the local community and are located in community facilities (SA annual report 96–97).

## Play schools (Australian Capital Territory)

Playschool provides a regular activity program for children aged 3–6 years. They usually operate during school terms on a sessional basis.

# 6  Summary

This draft data manual for a minimum data set for children's services has been prepared on the basis of the decisions made by the NCSIMG Children's Services Working Group at its meetings on 3 November 1999, 29 March 2000, and 27 July 2000

The draft data elements are currently awaiting clearance by individual jurisdictions prior to discussion of the implementation of the National Minimum Data Set.

# Appendix 1:  Glossary

**Approved for Child Care Benefit**

For an agency/outlet to be approved for the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit it must conduct its service(s) in accordance with a number of requirements as stipulated by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). Agencies/outlets approved for the Child Care Benefit are eligible for the higher rate of payment.

**(Children's services) Child**

A person, generally aged 0–12 years, who uses children's services.

**Child care**

Care provided to children generally between the ages of 0–12 years by a person other than the child's parent or guardian.

**Children's services**

All government provided and/or funded and/or licensed child care and preschool services.

**Enrolment for preschool**

A child is enrolled for preschool if the child's name appears on the register of a preschool class, i.e. the list of preschool attendances.

**Entitlement for preschool**

The total period of time (e.g. hours per week, weeks or terms per year) for which State/Territory governments provide funding for a child to attend a preschool service.

**Fee Period**

A length of time for which an outlet charges a fee for a child to use a children's service. For example, hour, session, day, week, term, etc.

**Government funded**

Agencies that receive Commonwealth and/or State/Territory government funding towards providing a specified service. Includes capital and operational funding, and funding to reduce the cost of charges to parents.

**Licensing**

State or Territory requirements under legislation which must be met for a service to operate. These include physical requirements, maximum number of children in attendance, staff qualifications and child:staff ratios.

**Reference week**

A discrete (unit/period) of time for the purposes of data collection. Typically a reference week would encompass from 12AM Monday morning to 12AM the following Monday morning.

**Registered for Child Care Benefit**

*Child care providers not approved for the Child Care Benefit may register for it. To register, providers must have a tax file number, or tax exemption and lodge an application. Parents using providers registered for the Child Care Benefit are eligible for the lower rate of payment.*

**Session**

A discrete period of time during which a service is available to children. For example, a 2 hour session of before school care prior to the commencement of the school day.

**Service component**

Commodities, activities or facilities supplied by the provider, other than core service(s). For example, nappy supplies, meals, gymnasium, laundry and dry cleaning.

**Type of service**

The care and developmental activities provided to children by an outlet. For example, long day care, preschool, occasional care, vacation care, before school care and after school care.

**Children's services worker**

Any person working in a children's services outlet.

# Appendix 2:   Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ASGC | Australian Standard Geographical Classification |
| CCB | Child Care Benefit |
| FaCS | Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services |
| ISO | International Standards Organisation |
| MDS | Minimum Data Set |
| NCSDC | National Community Services Data Committee |
| NCSDD | *National Community Services Data Dictionary* |
| NCSIA | National Community Services Information Agreement |
| NHDD | *National Health Data Dictionary* |
| NMDS | National Minimum Data Set |
| RRMA | Rural Remote and Metropolitan Areas (Classification) |
| SCCSISA | Standing Committee of Community Services and Income Security Administrators |
| SLA | Statistical Local Area |
| NCSIMG | National Community Services Information Management Group |

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