

6 Children's and family services

6.1 Introduction

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

Income support for children and families is mainly the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth has also provided funding for child care and family support services since the 1970s. Currently, the Commonwealth's 'Stronger Families and Communities' strategy provides funds for a range of services aimed at supporting families with children, and strengthening family relationships and community networks. The strategy is also funding the 'Growing up in Australia' longitudinal survey (see Box 6.1).

State and territory governments are responsible for child protection and out-of-home care services, including providing income support for children in home-based out-of-home care (see Section 6.5). In addition, they provide support to families through a broader range of services, such as child care, preschools, parental education and advice, and family support services. State and territory governments also provide rehabilitative, supervisory and care services to juvenile justice clients who have committed or allegedly committed offences. Some of these clients may also be involved with child protection services and/or Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services.

Both the Commonwealth Government and the state and territory governments are increasingly focusing on early intervention and prevention services. These services are seen to be effective in preventing serious family problems occurring, and reducing the need for more intrusive child protection interventions.

The Commonwealth Government has recently focused its attention on the early years of life (including the antenatal period) and has set up a taskforce to develop a National Agenda for Early Childhood. The Commonwealth is also working with the states and territories on a number of strategies to improve the situation of the most disadvantaged children in the community, for instance, Indigenous children in the child protection system (see Box 6.1).

The sections that follow report on those family and children's services for which national data are available: child care and preschool services, child protection and out-of-home care services, and adoptions. It is not possible, however, to provide a national picture on the full range of family and children's services. In particular, it is very difficult to compile national data on many of the services provided by state and

Box 6.1: Government initiatives on child development, health and wellbeing

The Commonwealth Government has funded a longitudinal survey of Australian children, 'Growing up in Australia', that will go into the field in the first half of 2004. The survey will examine the long-term outcomes for children's development and wellbeing. It will follow two cohorts of children – 2,000 children 12 months and younger and 2,000 children aged 4 years.

As a response to research findings on the importance of the early years of childhood for outcomes in later life, in September 2001 the Commonwealth Government established a Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing. The aim of the taskforce is to develop a 'whole of government' approach to the early years of life. Thus all Commonwealth departments relevant to children's issues are represented on the taskforce, including Family and Community Services (Chair), Education, Science and Training, and Health and Ageing.

On 22 September 2002, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Larry Anthony, announced the development of a National Agenda for Early Childhood, which would focus on early child and maternal health, early learning and care, and supporting child-friendly communities. The agenda is not intended to change the traditional Commonwealth, state and territory responsibilities for children's issues, but will examine ways for jurisdictions to work more collaboratively. The Commonwealth Task Force is in charge of managing the development of the National Agenda.

A consultation paper, 'Towards the Development of a National Agenda for Early Childhood', was released on 20 February 2003 by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Larry Anthony, and Professor Fiona Stanley, 2003 Australian of the Year. Consultations with key stakeholders were held between March and June 2003. Focus groups with parents were held in late July and August 2003.

Together with the states and territories, the Commonwealth is developing a National Action Plan for Foster Children and Carers. The aim of this Action Plan is to address the issue of better supporting foster carers and children in foster care. At its last meeting, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) acknowledged that child abuse remains a major problem in the Australian community.

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments are working together under the COAG Aboriginal Reconciliation Framework on Indigenous child protection issues, including examining the most appropriate ways to respond to Indigenous families at risk and in crisis, improving outcomes for Indigenous children and addressing causal factors.

Sources: AIHW 2001b; Anthony 2002a; Commonwealth Task Force on Child Development, Health and Wellbeing 2003.

territory governments, as the type and nature of such services and data collected about them vary markedly across jurisdictions (AIHW 2001a).

The chapter begins in Section 6.2 with some background information on the social and economic changes to families that have occurred over the last decade. Section 6.3 provides data on Commonwealth family payments, as well as on Commonwealth

expenditure on these payments. Section 6.4 examines the use of formal and informal child care and preschool services, the provision of and trends in formal child care services, and the outcomes of these services. Sections 6.5 on child protection and out-of-home care services and 6.6 on adoptions present information on the trends in these areas in the last 5 years. Section 6.7 discusses data developments in the children's services, child protection and juvenile justice areas. The chapter is summarised in Section 6.8.

6.2 Families and children in Australia

There have been major social and economic changes in Australia in the last 30 years that have led to significant alterations in the structure of families with dependent children. Some of the more important family changes include:

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

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

Family formation and dissolution

Patterns of family formation continued to change during the 1990s and into the 21st century. In particular, there were decreases in marriage rates at younger ages, an increase in cohabitation before marriage, decreases in fertility rates, further delays in family formation, and increases in the proportion of children born outside marriage.

Between 1991 and 2000, age-specific first marriage rates for people aged less than 30 years decreased. The rate for 25–29 year olds fell from 94 per 1,000 to 71 per 1,000 unmarried males and from 110 per 1,000 to 90 per 1,000 for unmarried females. For the older age groups, the rates decreased slightly, or increased. The first marriage rate for 30–34 year olds fell from 73 per 1,000 to 71 per 1,000 for males and rose from 69 per 1,000 to 75 per 1,000 for females. During this same decade, the median age of both men and women at first marriage increased by approximately 2 years (Table 6.1). Cohabitation before marriage has become more common over this period, with the proportion of couples living together before marriage increasing from 58% to 72% between 1991 and 2001 (ABS 2002a).

Table 6.1: Indicators of family formation and dissolution, 1991 and 2000

	Males		Females	
	1991	2000	1991	2000
Age-specific first marriage rates^(a)				
19 and under ^(b)	1.9	1.0	9.5	4.9
20–24	46.6	25.4	82.4	46.6
25–29	94.0	70.7	109.6	90.2
30–34	73.0	71.0	69.4	74.6
35–39	42.5	42.8	36.6	38.6
40–44	21.7	23.6	16.8	20.1
45–49	12.6	12.9	11.0	11.3
50 and over	3.8	4.4	2.1	2.8
Median age at first marriage	26.7	28.5	24.5	26.7
Divorce rate ^(c)	11.6	12.0	11.5	12.0

(a) Per 1,000 never married male or female population of the appropriate ages, at 30 June for each year shown.

(b) Per 1,000 never married male or female population aged 15–19 years, at 30 June for each year shown.

(c) Per 1,000 married males or females respectively, at 30 June for each year shown.

Source: ABS 2002a.

Divorce rates began to increase in the late 1960s, accelerated during the 1970s and stabilised during the 1980s (McDonald 1995). Through the 1990s and into the new century, family dissolution remained fairly stable. From 1991 to 2000, the divorce rate rose slightly for men from 11.6 per 1,000 to 12.0 per 1,000 and for women from 11.5 per 1,000 to 12.0 per 1,000. While there was an overall increase, the divorce rate did fluctuate somewhat during this period. There was also an increase between 1991 and 2001 in the number of children aged 0–17 years affected by divorce: from 10.2 per 1,000 to 11.1 per 1,000 (ABS 2002a, 2003a). Similarly to the divorce rate, the number of children affected by divorce also fluctuated within this period.

In recent years, falling fertility rates have been observed around the world. In Australia, the total fertility rate decreased from 1.86 in 1991 to 1.73 in 2001 (Table 6.2). In countries that are similar to Australia in social, cultural and economic terms, fertility rates have also continued to fall. For example, in 2001 the fertility rate fell to 1.63 in the United Kingdom, while it dropped to 1.52 in Canada in 1999. The fertility rate in New Zealand in 2001 was 1.97, and while this rate is higher than in many advanced countries, it too is falling (McDonald 2003).

Between 1991 and 2001, the median age of mothers at birth increased by 1.5 years, from 28.5 to 30.0 years. In addition to the decline in the total fertility rate and the increase in the age at which mothers are giving birth, the number of births to unmarried women has also been increasing.

Table 6.2: Birth indicators, 1991, 2000 and 2001

	1991	2000	2001
Median age of mother at confinement	28.5	29.8	30.0
Total fertility rate (no. children per woman)	1.86	1.75	1.73
Per cent of children born outside marriage	23.0	29.2	30.7
Per cent of births where paternity acknowledged	95.3	96.5	96.3

Source: ABS 2001a.

The proportion of children born outside marriage increased from 23% of births in 1991 to 31% in 2001. Children born outside marriage include those born in de facto relationships, as well as those born to single mothers. While there was a rise in the proportion of children born outside marriage, there was also a small rise in the proportion of births where paternity was acknowledged: from 95% to 96%.

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

Characteristics of families

One of the most significant changes in families between 1992 and 2002 was the large increase in the number of one-parent families. The estimated number of one-parent families with dependent children aged 0–14 years increased by 51% over the decade to reach 508,300 in 2002. Over the same period, the number of couple families with dependent children aged 0–14 remained steady at 1,710,400 in 1992 and 1,705,100 in 2002. In June 2002, there were 2,213,400 families with children aged 0–14 years, with 77% of these being couple families and 23% one-parent families (ABS 2002b).

The trends in divorce and remarriage rates in recent decades have partly contributed to the alterations in the structure and nature of families, including to the number of step and blended families. In 2001, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing showed that of all couple families with children (regardless of age), 6% were step-families, while an additional 4% were blended families (ABS 2003a).

Children

The number of children in Australia aged 0–17 years increased by 215,368 (5%) between June 1992 and June 2002 (Table 6.3). While the number of children in the 5–12 and 13–17 year age ranges increased, the number of children aged 0–4 years slightly decreased. This fall reflects the declining fertility rate.

Table 6.3: Estimated number of children aged 0–17 years and as a proportion of the total population, selected years from 30 June 1992 to 30 June 2002

Age (years)	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002
	Number ('000)					
0–4	1,284.7	1,298.0	1,297.0	1,289.5	1,279.0	1,270.4
5–12	2,034.9	2,057.1	2,090.4	2,118.4	2,153.4	2,171.5
13–17	1,266.2	1,257.7	1,289.4	1,309.3	1,334.6	1,359.2
<i>Total children 0–17</i>	<i>4,585.7</i>	<i>4,612.9</i>	<i>4,676.8</i>	<i>4,717.3</i>	<i>4,767.0</i>	<i>4,801.1</i>
Total population	17,494.7	17,854.7	18,310.7	18,711.3	19,153.4	19,662.8
	As a percentage of total population					
0–4	7	7	7	7	7	6
5–12	12	12	11	11	11	11
13–17	7	7	7	7	7	7
<i>Total children 0–17</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>24</i>

Source: ABS 2003c.

While the overall number of children increased over the decade, they represent a falling proportion of the total Australian population. At 30 June 1992 this group constituted 26% of the population, compared with 24% at 30 June 2002. Across all states and territories, their proportion was around 23–25%, except in the Northern Territory where it was markedly higher at 30% (see Table A6.1).

Families and employment

The 1990s was a period of relatively strong economic growth, with the number of employed people increasing from 7.7 million in 1992 to over 9 million at June 2002 (ABS 2002c). There was a corresponding fall in the unemployment rate: from 10.7% in June 1992 to 6.3% in June 2002.

The labour force participation rates of women of child-rearing age continued to rise in the decade up to June 2002, though the increase was not as great as in previous decades. The rates for women aged 25–34 years, for example, increased from 53% in 1982, to 66% in June 1992, and again to 71% in June 2002.

The growth in employment between 1992 and 2002 benefited families with dependent children. The number of couple families with dependent children aged 0–14 years and both partners employed increased by 89,900, and the number of employed sole parents with children aged 0–14 by 97,500 (Table 6.4).

While the number of families with both parents in employment grew between 1992 and 2002, there was also an increase in the number of one-parent families with no parent employed—73,600 over the period. In contrast, there was a decrease of 44,800 in the number of couple families in which neither partner was employed.

In 2002, among families with children aged 0–14 years, 57% of couple families had both parents in employment and 46% of sole parents were in employment. In contrast, 7% of couple families and 54% of sole-parent families had no parent employed.

Table 6.4: Employment patterns of families with dependent children aged 0–14 years, 1992 and 2002

Employment patterns and family type	1992		2002	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Couple families				
Both partners employed	884.0	51.7	973.8	57.1
One partner only employed				
Husband employed	607.2	35.5	550.5	32.3
Wife employed	51.1	3.0	57.6	3.4
Neither partner employed	168.1	9.8	123.1	7.2
Total	1,710.4	100.0	1,704.9	100.0
One-parent families				
Parent employed	137.0	40.6	234.7	46.2
Parent not employed	200.2	59.4	273.8	53.8
Total	337.2	100.0	508.5	100.0

Source: ABS 2002b.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

The profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families differs from that of other Australian families in a number of ways. Indigenous families are more likely to be one-parent families and to have on average a larger number of children and larger households. For example, the median Indigenous household (which is more likely than other Australian households to contain more than one family) had 3.4 persons, compared to 2.6 persons in other Australian households. Indigenous parents also tend to be younger and to have lower levels of education than other Australian parents. Indigenous families are much more likely to be economically disadvantaged, with lower employment rates of parents and lower median incomes. In 2001, the median weekly income for Indigenous households was 81% of that of other Australian households (Daly & Smith 1996, 2003).

6.3 Assistance for families

The Commonwealth Government provides support for families in the forms of family assistance payments and income support payments (see Box 6.2). Family assistance is designed to help middle- and low-income families with the costs of raising children, including recognising the indirect costs of reduced workforce participation by some families with young children. Higher assistance is targeted to families with low incomes. Income support in the form of Parenting Payment is available for sole parents with no income or a low income and for parents whose partner has no income or is on a low income.

Family assistance underwent a fundamental restructure in the tax reform package that came into effect on 1 July 2000. Two new payments were introduced—Family Tax Benefit (FTB) Parts A and B—which combined 10 forms of assistance that were previously available in the tax and transfer systems (AIHW 2001b:146). Families can choose to receive the FTB throughout the financial year as direct fortnightly payments or can wait until the end of the financial year and claim through their tax assessment. The system of family assistance is administered by the Family Assistance Office, which is located in Centrelink, Australian Taxation Office and Medicare branches.

Another new feature of the FTB payment is income-reconciliation at the end of the financial year (Whiteford et al. 2001:32). Since payments are income-tested, families choosing to claim the FTB as a direct payment are required to estimate their income for the forthcoming financial year. At the end of that year, their income is assessed to ascertain whether their estimation corresponds with their actual income, and if not, whether they have been 'overpaid' or are entitled to an additional payment. If their actual income is greater than their estimated income, they are required to pay back the amount of overpayment. If it is lower, they receive an extra payment. This system was introduced so that families receiving assistance through the payments system received the same entitlement as if they had chosen to claim assistance through the tax system. The same system applies to Child Care Benefit (CCB) payments.

In recognition of the difficulties that many families faced with overpayments in the first year of the scheme's operation, in July 2001 the government announced that the first \$1,000 of overpayments of the FTB and/or CCB for each family for the financial year

Box 6.2: Commonwealth family payments and tax relief

- **Family Tax Benefit Part A**—paid to low- and middle- income families with dependent children under 21 and/or dependent full-time students aged 21 to 24. It is paid for each dependent child in the family. The payment is subject to an income and assets test. There are three rates of Family Tax Benefit Part A: maximum rate, payable below a low-income threshold; part (or broken) rate, payable for families with incomes between the low-income threshold and the base rate threshold; and the base rate, which is payable for families with incomes above the base rate threshold and below the means-tested threshold. Maximum and part rates vary with the age of the child, with payments increasing for teenagers and young people.
- **Family Tax Benefit Part B**—provides additional assistance to single-income families, including single parents, with a child under 16 or a child aged 16–18 years studying full-time. Higher rates are payable where families have a child under 5. The payment is not means-tested for single parents. For couple families, the payment is means-tested on the income of the partner with the lower income (secondary income).
- **Parenting Payment**—income support payment for one parent with responsibility for caring for a child under 16 years of age. The two main streams are the Parenting Payment (single) paid to single parents with no income or a low income and the Parenting Payment (partnered) paid to the primary carer in a couple family where both parents have no income or a low income. For couple families, the Parenting Payment is income-tested on family income.
- **Maternity Allowance**—an income-tested lump sum payment for each newborn or adopted child in the family.
- **Maternity Immunisation Allowance**—payable at age 18 months for fully immunised children (appropriate for the age).
- **Double Orphan Pension**—for children whose parents are both dead, or one parent is dead and the other cannot care for the child, and for refugee children under certain circumstances.
- **Baby Bonus**—a tax offset which repays mothers for the tax that they paid on their income (up to a limit) in the year before the birth of their first child or (if they already have a child) the first child born to them after 1 July 2001. The refundable tax offset is paid each year until the child is 5 years. Mothers who had no earnings or were low-income earners in the year before the child's birth are entitled to a minimum payment each year. The Baby Bonus is means-tested on the mother's taxable income after the birth of the child.

Sources: ATO 2003; FaCS 2002a; FAO 2003.

2000–01 would be waived (Vanstone 2001). Families, however, continued to experience problems with overpayments. By September 2002, 1,885 complaints had been made to the Commonwealth Ombudsman about various aspects of the new family assistance system (including 157 complaints relating to the CCB). A subsequent investigation by the Ombudsman of the family assistance scheme highlighted the Ombudsman’s concerns with the effects on families of various aspects of the scheme, including the large number and size of debts and the impact on low-income families. While the Minister for Family and Community Services announced some changes to the administration of FTB and CCB payments in September 2002, the Ombudsman’s report released in February 2003 recommended some broader policy changes to the system (Commonwealth Ombudsman – Australia 2003).

A new payment—the Baby Bonus—providing tax relief to families with children was announced in the 2002–03 Budget and applies to the first child in the family or the first child born on or after 1 July 2001 (Commonwealth of Australia 2002:10). There were also changes to the assistance provided for child care at the time the tax reform package was introduced, with the CCB replacing Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate (see Box 6.5). The CCB is also administered through the Family Assistance Office.

Trends in family assistance

The vast majority of FTB recipients (more than 90%) receive assistance through fortnightly payments from Centrelink: 1.9 million families in 2000–01. Around 40,000 received Centrelink lump sum payments and another 97,000 were paid lump sums through the tax system as a tax offset (FaCS 2002b: 26).¹ It is estimated that for 2003–04, 95% of families will choose fortnightly payments through Centrelink and another 2% will opt for a lump sum through Centrelink (Commonwealth of Australia 2003).

Detailed data are not available on recipients who chose to receive family assistance payments through the tax system. However, it is likely that these would be higher income families who are entitled to the lower rates of assistance. No data are yet available on Baby Bonus recipients.

Almost 1.8 million families with nearly 3.5 million children received FTB Part A as a fortnightly payment at June 2001 and June 2002 (Table 6.5). In both years, more than half of these families were paid more than the base rate—59% at 30 June 2002. Around 1.2 million families with almost 2.3 million children received FTB Part B. Almost half of those receiving the payment were sole parents—48% at June 2002. Around 210,000 families were paid the Maternity Allowance in both 2001 and 2002 and just over 200,000 families received the Maternity Immunisation Allowance in each of these years.

In both years, the number of parents receiving Parenting Payment (single) was just over twice the number receiving Parenting Payment (partnered)—over 400,000 compared with around 200,000.

1 Note that families may appear in more than one of these categories, since they may use more than one payment system during the year.

Table 6.5: Number of recipients of family assistance and income support payments for families, 30 June 2001 and 30 June 2002 ('000)

Type of payment ^(a)	Recipients		Children	
	2001	2002	2001	2002
Family Tax Benefit Part A				
Maximum rate (with income support payment)	509.8	485.9	962.2	914.8
Maximum rate (without income support payment)	127.2	134.4	243.8	253.7
Broken rate	406.1	431.6	874.7	927.7
Base rate	725.4	708.7	1,333.0	1,298.5
Below base rate	31.2	34.2	68.5	76.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,799.7</i>	<i>1,794.8</i>	<i>3,482.2</i>	<i>3,471.2</i>
Family Tax Benefit Part B				
Maximum rate (for sole parents)	559.4	570.7	951.2	965.2
Maximum rate (for couples)	290.0	300.4	622.7	638.8
Broken rate (for couples)	331.7	328.0	702.3	689.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,181.1</i>	<i>1,199.1</i>	<i>2,276.2</i>	<i>2,293.3</i>
Maternity Allowance	210.1	212.2	214.4	216.1
Maternity Immunisation Allowance	203.9	206.8	207.5	210.6
Double Orphan Pension	1.2	1.2	1.6	n.a.
Parenting Payment (single)	416.7	427.8	..	..
Parenting Payment (partnered)	205.4	191.6	..	..

(a) The data on FTB recipients relate to those who claim fortnightly payments.

Note: For Maternity Allowance and Maternity Immunisation Allowance, the number of customers assisted is the number who received a payment during the financial year. For Parenting Payment recipients, the number of customers assisted is the number who received a payment in June (not at 30 June).

Sources: FaCS 2001, 2002b.

Commonwealth expenditure on assistance for families

Commonwealth expenditure on the main types of family assistance and income support payments for 2000–01 and 2001–02 is shown in Table 6.6. The FTB is clearly the largest expenditure item in both years, accounting for \$10.9 billion (or 65%) of total expenditure in 2001–02, with Parenting Payment (single and partnered) accounting for another \$5.6 billion (33%).

Table 6.6: Commonwealth expenditure on family assistance and income support payments, 2000–01 and 2001–02 (\$m)

Type of expenditure ^(a)	2000–01	2001–02
Family Tax Benefit Parts A & B	10,076.5	10,927.7
Maternity Allowance and Maternity Immunisation Allowance	217.9	216.9
Double Orphan Pension	2.0	2.0
Parenting Payment (single & partnered)	5,325.7	5,571.7

(a) FTB expenditure data relate to expenditure through Centrelink only. In 2000–01, revenue forgone through FTB claims through the tax system was \$11m. From 2001–02 onwards, these claims are recorded in the budget documentation as an expenditure.

Sources: FaCS 2001, 2002b; Treasury 2002.

6.4 Child care and preschool services

Formal child care services provide care and developmental activities for children usually between the ages of 0 and 12 years. Informal child care is provided by relatives and friends and other individuals such as paid babysitters and nannies. Child care enables parents to participate in employment, education and training, community activities and personal activities—it may also be used for family support reasons. As a condition of government funding and regulation, child care services must promote and enhance children’s emotional, intellectual, social and physical development. Preschool services offer educational and developmental programs for children in the year or two before full-time school. Most child care services are supported by the Commonwealth Government, while preschool services are mainly funded by the states and territories (see below.)

This section discusses child care and preschool data sources; the need for child care and preschool services; the use of child care; and the provision and delivery of government-supported child care services. The section concludes by examining service outcomes in terms of accessibility (including affordability) and quality.

Data sources

There are a number of different data collections relating to child care and preschool services (Box 6.3). The information used in this chapter, however, is mainly drawn from the ABS Child Care Survey and the Commonwealth Child Care Census and Centrelink administrative data. While the ABS survey and the Commonwealth census are used to present a picture of the overall patterns of use, the data are not directly comparable. The ABS survey collects information from parents on the use of ‘child care’ by children aged 0–11 years, with ‘child care’ including all formal child care services and preschools, as well as informal care. The census collects information from Commonwealth-supported child care service providers, with children using these formal services generally being 0–12 years.

Box 6.3: Child care and preschool services data collections

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Child Care Survey is conducted every 3 years and is a supplement to the ABS Labour Force Survey. The latest survey was conducted in 2002. This is an Australia-wide sample survey on the use of and demand for child care and preschool services.

The Commonwealth Child Care Census (CCC) is a census of Commonwealth-supported child care service providers, conducted by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). The census collects information from Commonwealth Child Care Support service providers on their staff, the children and parents using the service and various other aspects of service provision. The latest census of all Commonwealth-supported services was carried out in May 2002.

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

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

While data on child care and preschool services are currently collected and reported by 'funded/licensed' services type (Box 6.4), it is important to note that this no longer captures the reality of service provision. In the past decade, services have changed considerably, both in the way that they are provided and the way that parents and children use them. Service providers have moved into a more flexible type of service provision in order to meet parents' and children's needs and market demands. 'Funded service type' thus no longer fully describes what services are provided to children. Many 'long day care centres', for instance, provide long day care, a preschool program (or access to a program), part-time care and outside school hours care (AIHW 2002a:xiii).

Currently Commonwealth, state and territory data collections use different data collection forms for the various funded/licensed types of children's services, for instance, different forms for 'long day care centres', 'outside school hours care services' and 'preschools'. A pilot test, conducted in 2002, for a proposed Children's Services National Minimum Data Set was successful in using the one collection form to obtain data from all service providers using the same mode of service delivery—centre-based, home-based or mobile—but providing different types of funded services. This is discussed in more detail in Section 6.7.

The need for child care and preschool services

All parents of children 12 years of age and younger could potentially need someone other than themselves to care for their children. In 2002, there were nearly 3.5 million children aged 12 years and under in Australia, representing the potential population needing some form of child care (see Table 6.3). Of these children, around 257,000 were 4 years of age and potentially needing preschool services (ABS 2003b).²

One of the main reasons parents need child care is to participate in the workforce. At June 2002, there were around 805,000 couple families and 173,000 one-parent families with at least one child under 5 years (see Table A6.2). In half of the couple families, both parents were in the labour force as were 41% of sole parents. When the youngest child was 5 years or older, a higher proportion of families had both parents (or the sole parent) in the labour force. Where the youngest child was 5–9 years, for instance, both parents in 68% of couple families and 58% of sole parents were in the labour force.

These findings reflect the increasing labour force participation of all mothers. For example, at August 2001, 35% of mothers with a child under 1 year were in the labour force, compared with 53% of mothers whose youngest child was aged 2 and 66% whose

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

youngest child was 6 years of age (Figure 6.1). By the time their youngest child was 2 years old, almost half (49%) of all mothers were in paid employment.

Box 6.4: Formal child care services – funding/licensing types and definitions

***Long day care centres** are facilities (purpose-built or modified to provide child care) in which staff provide care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age. These centres are generally open for at least 8 hours per day, 5 days per week, 48 weeks of the year.*

***Preschool services** offer educational and developmental programs for children in the year or two before they begin full-time school. Dedicated preschools offer sessional programs during school terms only. Sessional programs generally involve a distinct group of children meeting for around two to four sessions per week, each session lasting half the normal school day or the full school day. Many long day care centres provide a preschool program run by a qualified early childhood teacher.*

***Family day care schemes** comprise networks of individuals who provide care and developmental activities in their own homes for children 0–12 years. Family day care providers are recruited and supported by a central coordination unit, which administers the scheme.*

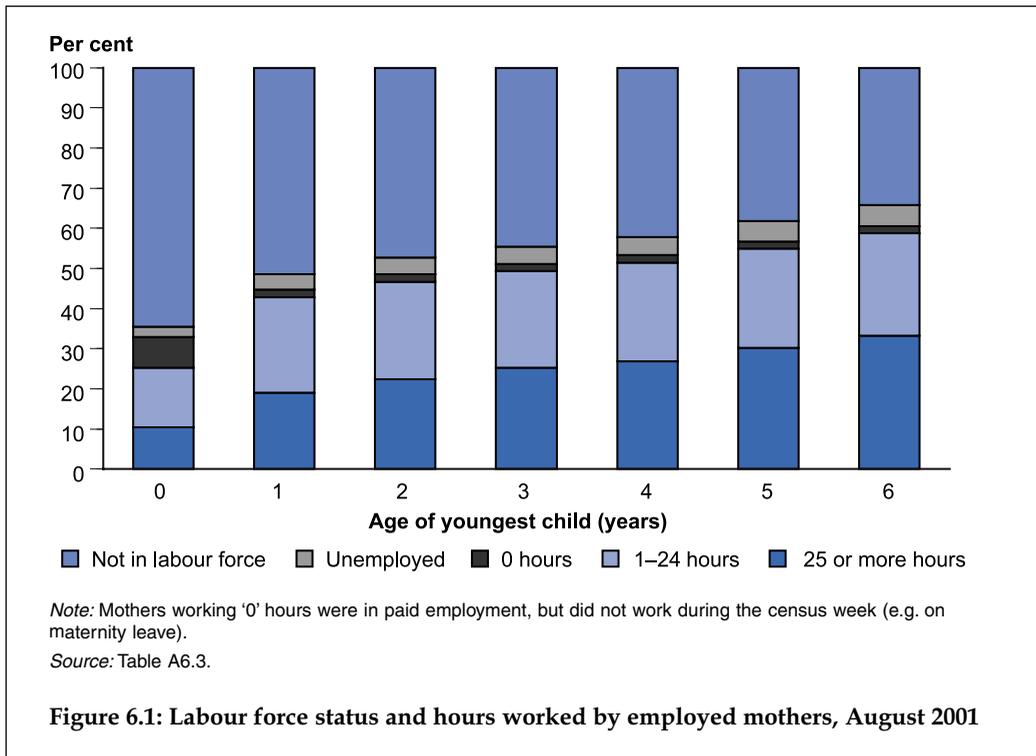
***In-home care** is child care provided in the child's home by an approved carer. It can be provided by a family day care scheme, a long day care centre or a private nanny service. This service assists families who cannot access other child care services and who need more flexible forms of child care. This includes families living in rural areas, parents who work non-standard hours or shifts and parents with a sick child or a child with a disability.*

***Outside school hours care services** offer care and developmental activities for primary school-aged children out of school hours. The main types of services provided are before school care, after school care, vacation care and care on 'pupil-free' days.*

***Occasional care services** were originally set up to provide child care for children under school age, to assist parents who need care for short periods of time, for reasons such as attending adult education classes, medical appointments, going shopping, or simply for respite. Nowadays, many occasional care services provide regular part-time care, for working parents.*

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

Source: AIHW 2000a.



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

While parents' participation in employment creates much of the need for child care in Australia, there are other reasons. Parents may need child care to participate in employment and training, for personal reasons, as a form of family support and/or because they think it is beneficial for the child. Child care services are important in satisfying children's needs for companionship and play opportunities and for their general development.

The use of child care

The ABS estimated that, in June 2002, just under half (49%) of the 3.1 million children aged 0-11 years in Australia (1.5 million) were in child care in the reference week (Table 6.7). The ABS definition of 'in care' includes children using formal child care and preschool services as well as those being cared for in informal arrangements by 'family members, friends, neighbours, paid babysitters and nannies' (ABS 2003c:2).

Table 6.7: The use of informal and formal care, by age of child, 2002 (per cent)

Type of care	Age of child (years)								Total
	Under 1	1	2	3	4	5	6–8	9–11	
Formal only	4.2	15.7	25.5	37.5	54.1	17.3	8.3	4.7	15.8
Both	2.8	11.2	15.6	25.2	28.8	10.9	4.7	2.6	9.6
Informal only	26.9	30	24	13.4	5.4	21.5	27.3	25.4	23.3
<i>Total children in care</i>	<i>33.9</i>	<i>57.0</i>	<i>65.1</i>	<i>76.1</i>	<i>88.4</i>	<i>49.7</i>	<i>40.4</i>	<i>32.6</i>	<i>48.7</i>
Children who did not use care	66.1	43.0	34.9	23.9	11.6	50.3	59.6	67.4	51.3
Total children	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of children ('000)	242.2	247.4	249.3	252.3	250.9	257.6	793.4	806.8	3,100.0

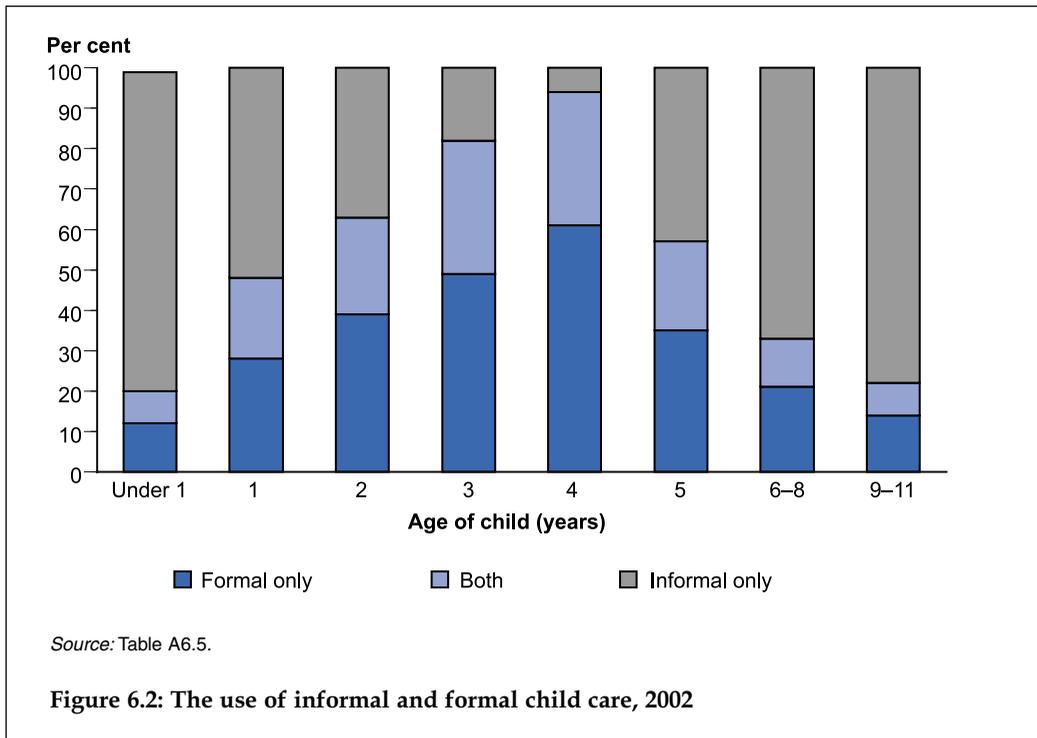
Source: ABS 2003b.

The total number of children using child care was around the same in June 2002 as in June 1993, but the types of care used changed markedly over the period, both for those aged 0–4 years and those aged 5–11 years (see Table A6.4). Between 1993 and 2002, there was a substantial increase in the number of children who used only formal care, a smaller rise in the number who used both formal and informal care and a corresponding fall in the number using only informal care. The number of children using only formal care increased by 39% for children 0–4 years and by 60% for those aged 5–11 years. In contrast, the number of children aged 0–4 years who used only informal care fell by 28%, compared with 16% for those aged 5–11 years.

The distributions of children in care across the various types of care were thus very different in 2002 from 1993. In June 1993, 11% of all children 0–11 years were using only formal care, 29% only informal care and 8% both types of care. In contrast, by June 2002, 16% of children were using only formal care, 23% only informal care and 10% both types of care. The increase in the use of formal care is clearly related to improvements in accessibility of care (including affordability), which are discussed in later sections.

The proportion of all children using care varied with the age of the child, being higher for each year of age up to age 4. In 2002, 34% of children aged less than 1 year were using care, compared with 88% of children aged 4 years. The proportion was markedly lower at age 5 (50%) and lower again at ages 9–11 years (33%). Most children aged 5 years and older are at school and thus less likely to need care.

The types of child care used also varied with the age of the child. Informal care was the most common both for very young children and for those aged 6 years and over. In 2002, the proportion of children in child care who were using only informal care was 79% for those aged under 1 year, 6% for those aged 4 and 78% for those aged 9–11 (Figure 6.2).



The use of formal care varied correspondingly, being higher for each year of age up to age 4. For children aged under 1 year using care, 12% were in formal care only and 8% were using both formal and informal care, while for children aged 4 years the corresponding percentages were 61% and 33%. The high proportion of children using formal care at age 4 reflects the fact that over half (59%) were attending preschool services (ABS 2003b). Among those aged 5 years using care, the proportion who used formal care was significantly lower, with 35% using only formal care and 22% using both formal and informal care. Among children aged 9-11 using care, 14% were using only formal care and 8% both formal and informal care.

Types of formal and informal care

Children in 2002 used various types of care (Table 6.8). It should be noted that where a child was in more than one type of care during the survey period, they were counted for each type.

Among children aged 0-4 years in care, the most common type was care by a grandparent (39%), then care in a long day care centre (35%), followed by preschool (24%). Care by a grandparent was also the most common type (39%) for children aged 5-11. Before and after school care was the next most common type (23%), followed by an unrelated informal carer (20%).

Table 6.8: Children aged under 12 years in child care, by type of care, 2002

Type of care	0–4 year olds		5–11 year olds	
	Number ('000)	% of total in care	Number ('000)	% of total in care
Formal care				
Before and after school care	*4.3	0.5	166.8	23.4
Long day care centre	282.2	35.3	14.8	2.1
Family day care	76.8	9.6	19.1	2.7
Occasional care	33.8	4.2	*2.4	0.3
Preschool	195.2	24.4	44.0	6.2
Other formal care	8.5	1.1	*3.2	0.4
<i>Total children who used formal care^(a)</i>	<i>552.4</i>	<i>69.1</i>	<i>235.0</i>	<i>33.0</i>
Informal care				
Grandparent	312.6	39.1	279.1	39.2
Brother/sister	10.4	1.3	60.1	8.4
Other relative	84.5	10.6	123.8	17.4
Other person	85.9	10.8	141.3	19.9
<i>Total children who used informal care^(a)</i>	<i>456.0</i>	<i>57.1</i>	<i>563.2</i>	<i>79.2</i>
Total children in care	799.0	100.0	711.5	100.0

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

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

Source: ABS 2003b.

While grandparents were the most common carers for children in both age groups, children cared for by grandparents and other informal carers were more likely to be in care for shorter periods of time than children in formal care.

Hours in care

The majority of children (84%) in child care were there for less than 30 hours per week (Table 6.9). Only 6% were using care for 45 hours or more per week.

Children using only informal care were much more likely to be in care for fewer hours than those using only formal care or those using both formal and informal care. For example, 36% of children using only informal care were in care for less than 5 hours per week, compared with 17% using only formal care and 3% using both.

Table 6.9: Children aged under 12 years in child care, by the number of hours per week in care, 2002 (per cent)

Type of care	Number of hours (per week)						Total
	Less than 5	5–9	10–19	20–29	30–44	45 or more	
Formal only	17.4	25.0	34.7	11.9	8.9	2.0	100.0
Both	3.2	11.5	32.0	21.1	20.5	11.6	100.0
Informal only	36.4	23.6	19.6	7.7	5.7	7.1	100.0
Total in care	23.7	21.7	27.0	11.7	9.6	6.3	100.0
Total number of children in care ('000)	358.1	327.3	407.6	176.7	145.4	95.4	1,510.5

Source: ABS 2003b.

Children who used both types of care were most likely to be in care for longer periods: 32% for 30 hours or more per week, compared with 13% using only informal care and 11% only formal care.

Reasons for using child care

The main reason parents gave for using child care differed by the type of care and the age of the child (Table 6.10). For children aged 0–4 years, the most common reason for using formal care was that it was considered beneficial for the child (44%), closely followed by work-related reasons (39%), while informal care was mostly used for work-related reasons (45%), followed by personal reasons (43%).

For around half or more of children aged 5–11 in care, parents reported that the main reason was ‘work-related’ (70% of children in formal care and 47% in informal care). Parents using formal care were more likely to report that they mainly used it because it was ‘beneficial for the child’ (18% of children) rather than for ‘personal reasons’ (9%). Parents using informal care, on the other hand, were more likely to report that they used it for ‘personal reasons’ (33%) rather than it was ‘beneficial for the child’ (3%).

It is important to note that the proportion of children whose parents gave ‘work-related’ as the main reason for using care does not indicate the employment status of parents of children using care. For instance, ‘work-related’ was given as the main reason for using formal care for 48% of children 0–11 years in formal care, yet both parents (or the sole parent) of 60% of children 0–11 years using formal care were employed.

Table 6.10: Children aged under 12 years in child care, by main reason parents gave for using care, 2002

Main reason	Formal care		Informal care	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
0–4 year olds				
Work-related	214.2	39	204.7	45
Personal	75.9	14	196.5	43
Beneficial for the child	244.2	44	12.0	3
Other	18.1	3	42.8	9
Total	552.4	100	456.0	100
5–11 year olds				
Work-related	164.6	70	267.5	47
Personal	21.1	9	186.7	33
Beneficial for the child	41.6	18	19.0	3
Other	7.7	3	90.1	16
Total	235	100	563.2	100

Note: ‘Work-related’ includes working, looking for work and studying/training for work. ‘Personal’ includes non-work-related study or training, shopping, social or sporting activities, giving parents a break, doctor’s visits and voluntary/community activities. ‘Beneficial for the child’ includes ‘good for the child’ and ‘prepare the child for school’.

Source: ABS 2003b.

The provision of formal child care services

The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) supports the provision of formal child care services through Commonwealth Child Care Support (Box 6.5). A range of strategies promotes the supply, accessibility, flexibility, quality and affordability of child care services (FaCS 2002b:73). Through this program, the Commonwealth assists parents to participate in the workforce and the community, helps families balance work and parenting, supports child care that contributes to children's education and development, and promotes child care as an early intervention and prevention strategy for vulnerable families.

Box 6.5: Commonwealth Child Care Support

There are two categories of funding under this program – Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Support Broadband. The Child Care Support Broadband is currently under review (see Box 6.6).

Child Care Benefit assists families with their child care costs (see Box 6.7).

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

Child Care Support Broadband funding supports child care services by providing:

- *funding for training and resource activities – funds are given to various contracted and approved agencies that provide training and support activities to interested child care providers;*
- *operational subsidies, including travel grants;*
- *additional funding to support the inclusion of children with special needs into child care services;*
- *set-up grants and grants for purchase of equipment;*
- *direct service provision; and*
- *other program support such as accreditation.*

Source: FaCS 2003a.

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

In the past 2 years, the Commonwealth has introduced a number of initiatives in relation to child care, including the implementation of new quality assurance systems and the redevelopment of Child Care Support Broadband funding.

All state and territory governments fund dedicated preschool services for children in the year or two before they begin school full-time (Press & Hayes 2000:77). Currently in all jurisdictions except Queensland, the first year of full-time school is the year prior to entry into Year 1. Queensland is currently in its first year of trialling a full-time year prior to Year 1, with a proposal to implement this state-wide in 2006 (Beattie 2002).

States and territories also provide some funding for child care services—mainly occasional care services, vacation care services and, in some jurisdictions, long day care centres. For instance, in Victoria, the state government provides funding for occasional care services and TAFE long day care centres. State and territory governments are also responsible for licensing/regulating child care services within their jurisdiction. The Commonwealth Government and some state and territory Governments have accreditation processes in place for some of their funded services.

As noted previously, nationally comprehensive and comparable data on state and territory funded preschool and child care services are not available, although illustrative data are published in the *Report on Government Services* (SCRCSSP 2003:ch. 14).

Because of the lack of national data, the following sections will focus solely on formal child care services supported by the Commonwealth, using data from the Commonwealth Child Care Census and administrative data collections (see Box 6.3).

Ownership of child care services

Although the Commonwealth has a major role in supporting the provision of child care services, it does not directly provide such services. In June 2001, two-thirds (67%) of long day care centres were owned by private-for-profit bodies, while the vast majority of other types of funded services (96% or more) were owned by community-based bodies (Table 6.11).

Eligibility for Commonwealth fee relief was extended to private-for-profit long day care centres from 1 January 1991, but private-for-profit bodies were not eligible for support to provide other types of funded services until much later. Private-for-profit in-home care (nanny) services became eligible for 'in-home care' funding from 1 January 2001, while private-for-profit bodies became eligible for support to provide family day care and outside school hours care services in specified geographic areas from 1 July 2001.

Table 6.11: Commonwealth-supported child care services, by type of ownership, 30 June 2001 (per cent)

Type of ownership	Long day care centres	Family day care ^(a)	Outside school hours care	Occasional/other care ^(b)
Private-for-profit	66.9	3.2	3.6	0.7
Community-based ^(c)	33.1	96.8	96.4	99.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total number of agencies	4,073	408	5,407	162

(a) Family day care coordination units. Also includes family day care schemes offering in-home care, and stand-alone in-home care services.

(b) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services and other multifunctional services.

(c) Includes services operated by community-based groups, religious organisations, charities, local governments, and by or in state government premises.

Source: FaCS 2001 administrative data.

One new development in the child care area has been the floating of private-for-profit child care businesses as public companies on the stock exchange. The first company was floated in 2001, with others listing on the exchange in the last quarter of 2002. At April 2003, there were four public child care companies, mainly involved in running and/or managing child care centres (Marney 2002; Salmons 2003). At this time, the largest public child care company owned more than 120 long day care centres and was planning to take over one of the other companies.

Trends in Commonwealth-supported child care

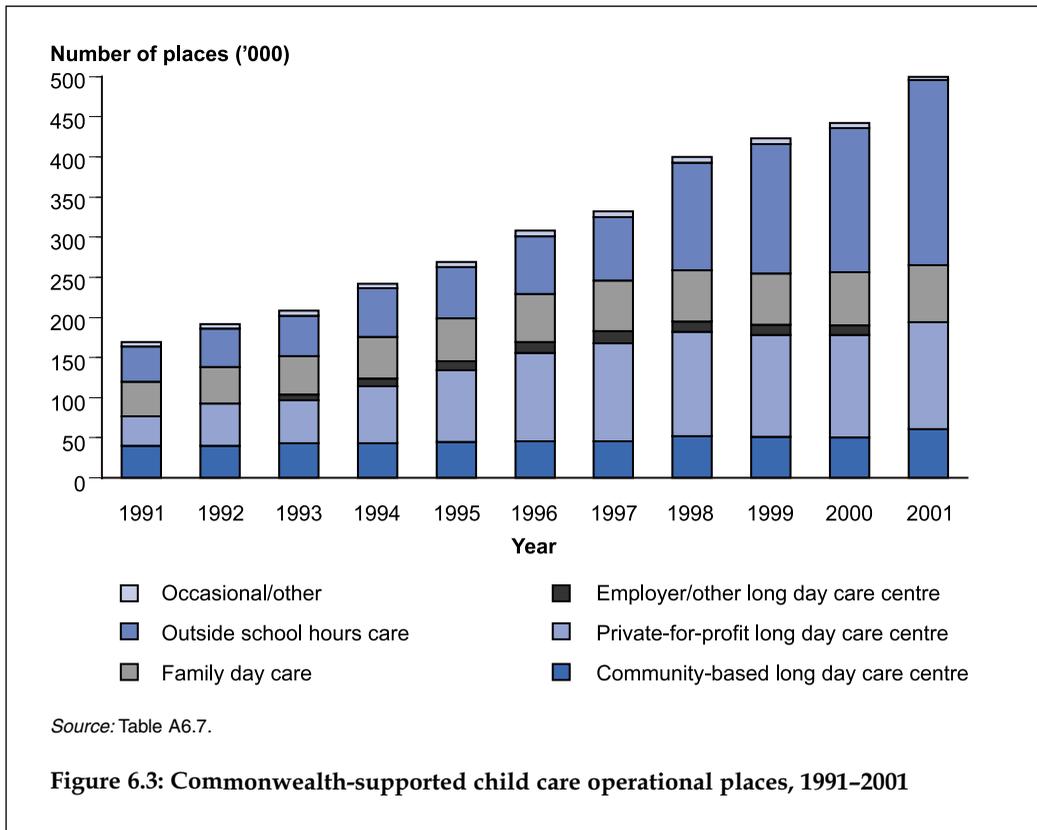
Number of service providers and child care places

Between 1991 and 2001, the total number of services supported by the Commonwealth increased two and a half times (from 3,972 to 10,050 services) (Table A6.6), while the total number of Commonwealth-supported places increased almost threefold (from 168,276 to 500,034) (Figure 6.3).

Long day care centre places increased two and a half times between 1991 and 2001, from 76,267 to 193,809 places (Table A6.7). Between 1991 and 2001, the number of places in community-based centres grew by 55%, while the number in private centres increased almost four times. This led to a huge change in the profile of Commonwealth-supported long day care centre places over the period. In 1991, just over half of all places (52%) were in community-based centres, but by 2001 the proportion had dropped to just under a third (32%).

Places in family day care services grew steadily between 1991 and 2001, increasing by two-thirds (67%), (from 42,501 to 70,840). Since 2001, 'family day care places' include in-home care places, both those in family day care schemes and in 'stand-alone' in-home services, such as private nanny agencies.

There was enormous growth in outside school hours care places between 1991 and 2001, with the number increasing fivefold (from 44,449 to 230,511). It is important to note that the large increase between 1997 and 1998 was mainly due to the inclusion of some Commonwealth-supported places not previously recorded in the database, and to changes in the counting methodology.



The Commonwealth has focused on increasing the supply of outside school hours care places in recent years (FaCS 2001). Consequently, these places have grown at a faster rate than other types of places. Between 2000 and 2001, outside school hours care places increased by 28%, compared with a growth of 2% in long day care centre places and 7% in family day care/in home-care places.

For each long day care centre and outside school hours care service provider, the total number of child care places is equivalent to the total number of children who can use the service at any one time during the hours that the service operates.

Number of children

The number of children using child care services is higher than the number of places, since most children are not in care full-time (AIHW 2002a:26). The total number of children using Commonwealth-supported child care services more than doubled between 1991 and 2002, from 262,200 to 623,900 (Table 6.12). In 2002, more than half of these children (59%) were using long day care centres and 24% were using before and after school care services.

Table 6.12: Number of children in Commonwealth supported-child care services, by type of service, 1991–2002

	Long day care	Family day care	Before/after school care	Vacation care	Other formal care ^(a)	Total
1991	135,400	61,000	46,800	..	19,000	262,200
1992	158,400	66,100	50,700	..	26,500	301,700
1993	190,600	78,800	53,500	..	20,900	343,800
1994	227,300	88,700	63,900	n.a.	16,800	396,700
1995	251,000	85,600	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1996	n.a.	n.a.	96,400	24,300	19,100	n.a.
1997	294,700	85,000	99,500	31,000	n.a.	n.a.
1999	301,500	83,100	107,400	69,300	16,100	508,200
2000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2001	n.a.	95,800	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2002	367,100	95,600	148,000	103,600	13,100	623,900

(a) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services and other multifunctional services.

Notes

1. These data measure occurrences of care and include some double-counting where children attend more than one service. Totals for 1999 and 2002 exclude children in vacation care, since many of these children would also have been attending before/after school care.
2. Figures for 1991–94 are estimates based on previous years' census data. Figures for 1995–97 are from the CP Census conducted in August of each year and are weighted for non-response. However, not all service types were surveyed in each of these years. Figures for 1999 and 2002 are from the census conducted in May in each of those years and are weighted for non-response.
3. Components may not add to totals due to rounding.

Sources: AIHW 1999a; FaCS unpublished data.

Characteristics of children in Commonwealth-supported child care

The majority of children using Commonwealth-supported services were in 'work-related care', that is, from families with both parents (or a sole parent) in the labour force or studying/training for work. With the exception of occasional care services, the proportion of children in work-related care in 2002 ranged from 83% in multifunctional services to 96% in before/after school care (see Table A6.8). Even in occasional care services, which were originally set up for non-work-related care (see Box 6.4), 49% of children were in care for work-related reasons.

The age distribution of children in the different types of care varied, reflecting the different aims of these services. Long day care services, for instance, are targeted to children below school age. In 2002, the majority of children in long day care and family day care services were aged 0–4 years, while almost all the children in outside school hours care services were aged 5 and older (Table 6.13). There was, however, a strong indication of a more flexible type of service provision, with 27% of children in family day care and 11% of children in privately owned long day care centres being 5 years of age and older and thus using these services for school-aged care.

Table 6.13: Percentage of children in Commonwealth-supported child care services, by age of child and type of service, 2002

Type of service	Age of children (years)					Total
	Under 1	1–2	3–4	5	6+	
Long day care centres	3	34	53	6	3	100
Community-based	4	39	52	3	1	100
Private-for-profit	3	32	53	6	5	100
Family day care	5	36	32	6	21	100
Before/after school care	0	0	1	12	86	100
Vacation care	0	<1	1	10	89	100
Occasional /other care ^(a)	5	43	43	3	6	100

(a) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services and other multifunctional services.

Notes

1. Double-counting may occur for children in before/after school care and vacation care services.
2. Data are weighted for service provider non-response.
3. Some individual percentages may add to less or greater than 100 due to rounding.

Source: FaCS 2003b.

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

Funding is provided through the Child Care Broadband. One of main issues in the redevelopment of the Broadband (see Box 6.6) is to address the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council report's recommendation that access to child care services for families with additional needs and their participation in these services should be improved (Community Link Australia 2002). While still awaiting the outcome of the review, the federal government committed additional funding for the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (SNSS) in the 2003–04 Federal Budget. The SNSS assists children with high support needs to access child care services by providing funding for services to employ additional child care workers, to assist them with special equipment and to train workers to support these children.

In 2002, children from one-parent families constituted the largest group of children with special needs using Commonwealth-supported child care services (22%), followed by children from a culturally diverse background (11%) (Table 6.14). The proportion of children from other groups with special needs was 3% or less. The use of care by children with special needs varied by service type. The relatively high proportion of children in multifunctional services who were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is because this category includes multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (MACS) which are specifically provided to meet the cultural needs of these children.

Box 6.6: Commonwealth child care initiatives 2002 and 2003

- A revised accreditation system for long day care centres was introduced in January 2002, while a new accreditation system for family day care services commenced in July 2002 and the outside school hours care quality assurance system in July 2003.
- From 11 April 2002, funding for the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (SNSS), which supports the inclusion of children with a disability into child care services, was capped at \$20 million.
- On 14 September 2002, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Hon. Larry Anthony, announced a new peak body on child care – the Child Care Reference Group. Its members are drawn from the major child care peak bodies and include the chair of the National Accreditation Council.
- On 23 September 2002, the Hon. Larry Anthony announced some future directions for child care services in response to the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council's report *Child Care: Beyond 2001* (CCCAC 2001):
 - The Child Care Support Broadband (see Box 6.5) would be assessed and redeveloped, and a department taskforce was appointed to lead this process. The Taskforce would work closely with the Child Care Reference Group and there would be broad consultation on the Broadband redevelopment.
 - A 'Think Tank' would be convened to develop strategies to address child care workforce issues and the recommendations set out in the CCCAC report. This would involve state and territory governments, FaCS and other relevant Commonwealth departments, child care sector representatives, and child care worker education and training providers.
- In December 2002, a consultant was engaged to manage the Broadband redevelopment consultation process which would start in February 2003 and to prepare a report recommending new Broadband arrangements by the middle of 2003.
- On 28 February 2003, it was announced that the Think Tank on child care workforce issues would be convened in Canberra on 8–9 April 2003. Participants discussed issues critical to the future of the child care profession and developed a number of recommendations and strategies to address these issues.
- The 2003–04 Federal Budget committed \$25.8 million over 4 years for the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme (SNSS). It was estimated that this would assist an additional 1,250 children with high support needs (such as those with a disability) to access child care services.

Sources: Anthony 2002b, 2002c, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Community Link Australia 2002; NCAC 2003.

Table 6.14: Children with special needs as a proportion of all children using Commonwealth-supported child care services, 2002 (per cent)

Type of special need	Long			Multi-functional,			All services ^(a)
	day care centres	Family day care	Occasional care	MACS, In-home care	Before/after school care	Vacation care	
Children from one-parent families	19	26	n.a.	33	28	n.a.	22
Child with disability	2	4	2	6	2	3	3
Parent with disability	1	<1	1	3	<1	<1	<1
Child at risk of abuse/neglect	<1	1	1	3	<1	<1	<1
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2	1	1	32	1	2	2
Culturally diverse background	12	8	10	2	11	8	11
Total number of children in care	367,129	95,630	8,637	4,454	148,044	103,562	623,894

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

Notes

1. Data on family type were not collected for occasional care services.
2. Some children may be included in more than one special needs category.
3. These data are weighted for agency non-response.

Source: FaCS 2003b.

The proportion of children in Commonwealth-supported child care (22%) who were from one-parent families was higher than the proportion in the population. In 2002, 19% of Australian children aged 0–11 were from one-parent families (ABS 2003c). It is hardly surprising that one-parent families are more likely to use child care services than other families, given that they are likely to have a greater need for child care because there is no co-resident parent available to provide care.

In contrast, the proportion of children in child care who had a disability and the proportion who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander was lower than the proportion of these groups of children in the population.³ Of children in Commonwealth-supported child care services in 2002, 3% had a disability. In contrast, the latest data for children with a disability show that, in 1998, 4% of children in Australia aged 0–4 years and 9% aged 5–14 had a disability (ABS 1999:14). Similarly, only 2% of children in these child care services were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, whereas

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

Indigenous children were estimated to constitute 4.6% of the Australian population aged 0–12 years in June 2001 (ABS and AIHW 2003). However, the Commonwealth Child Care Census data do not include children attending Commonwealth-supported flexible and innovative services, many of whom are Indigenous.

No population data are available to classify Australian children according to the definition of ‘culturally diverse background’ used in the Commonwealth Child Care Census—‘child with a culturally diverse background, including those with a parent born overseas in a country where the first language is not English’. There are also no population data on parents with a disability or children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Number of workers

In May 2002, there were an estimated 77,086 paid workers in child care services, an increase of 19% from the 64,899 paid workers in 1997. There was also a small number of unpaid workers—3,624 in 2002; this includes students on work experience, volunteers and parent helpers (Table 6.15). The number of family day care providers (all of whom were paid) fell by 9% between 1997 and 2002, while the number of places rose by 13% between 1997 and 2001 (see Table A6.7). This suggests that family day care providers increased their working hours and/or the number of children in their care.

Table 6.15: Estimated numbers of paid and unpaid child care workers, 1997, 1999, 2002

Type of service	1997		1999		2002	
	Paid workers	Unpaid workers	Paid workers	Unpaid workers	Paid workers	Unpaid workers
Long day care centres	40,070	2,911	39,710	3,464	48,012	2,975
Community-based	13,703	841	12,950	1,073	18,021	1,221
Private-for-profit	26,367	2,070	26,760	2,391	29,991	1,754
Family day care coordination unit staff	1,663	53	1,612	32	1,729	37
Family day care providers	14,039	*	12,691	*	12,816	*
Before/after school care ^(a)	7,633	452	8,329	347	11,786	464
Vacation care	3,514	320	8,111	601	12,560	557
Occasional /other care	1,494	221	1,382	196	2,170	135
In-home care coordination unit staff	..	..	..	..	144	13
In-home care provider	..	..	..	..	429	*
Total^(b)	64,899	3,367	63,724	4,039	77,086	3,624

*Family day care providers and in-home care providers are all paid workers.

(a) Includes occasional care centres, multifunctional Aboriginal children’s services, multifunctional children’s services and also in-home care services in 2002 (weighted).

(b) Totals do not include workers in vacation care, since many of these would have also been working in before/after school care services.

Note: Data are from the FaCS Child Care Census and are weighted.

Sources: FaCS 1997, 1999, 2003b.

Although the number of child care workers in service types other than family day care increased between 1997 and 2002, in recent years there has been an unmet demand for child care workers. The Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council's report *Child Care: Beyond 2001*, notes that workers in the child care field typically have low wages, poor working conditions, limited career paths and low status in the community (CCCAC 2001). Consequently, there has been a high turnover of staff, resulting in a severe shortage of child care workers. This is confirmed by a number of recent reports on workforce issues in the child care area (Community and Health Works 2002; Finger 2002). One report also found that the number of students undertaking a diploma in child care was decreasing (Community and Health Works 2002). Many of the students who had completed a diploma were undertaking further training in early childhood studies in order to work in dedicated preschools or primary schools, where the pay, conditions and status were higher than in child care. A 'Think Tank' was convened in April 2003 by the Commonwealth Minister for Children and Youth Affairs to address the child care workforce issues (see Box 6.6). As shown in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.5), workers in the child care field in 2002 earned considerably less than many other community services workers, with average full-time earnings of \$424 per week for child care workers and \$370 per week for family day care workers.

Table 6.16: Commonwealth expenditure on child care services, 1991–92 to 1999–2002 (\$m in current and constant prices)

	Childcare Assistance ^(a)	Childcare Rebate	Child Care Benefit	Other services (a) (b)	JET ^(c)	Departmental running costs	Total (current prices)	Total (constant 2000–01 prices)	Deflator ^(d)
1991–92	289	..	..	145	..	14	449	525	85.6
1992–93	384	..	..	154	..	16	555	634	87.5
1993–94	497	..	..	170	..	23	691	784	88.1
1994–95	592	87	..	181	..	34	894	1,009	88.6
1995–96	657	121	..	191	10	36	1,014	1,124	90.2
1996–97	711	127	..	206	7	41	1,092	1,187	92.0
1997–98	640	123	..	218	5	40	1,026	1,097	93.5
1998–99	677	121	..	182	10	102	1,091	1,135	96.1
Break in series									
1999–00	749	164	..	195	11	158	1,278	1,320	96.8
2000–01	0.2	-14.6	1,037	180	7.3	146	1,356	1,356	100.0
2001–02	0.8	0.1	1,316	187	11	131	1,646	1,607	102.4

(a) Including Special Purpose Payments.

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

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

(d) The Government Final Consumption Expenditure deflator has been used to adjust expenditure for inflation. The first seven columns of the table are in current prices, the eighth column in constant prices.

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

Sources: ABS 2002d, FaCS 2002b.

Government expenditure on child care

Between 1991–92 and 1998–99, Commonwealth expenditure on child care services more than doubled in real terms (constant prices), increasing from \$525 million to \$1,135 million (Table 6.16). Expenditure first became reported on an accrual basis, rather than on a cash basis, in 1999–00 resulting in a break in time-series data. In the 2 years from 1999–00 to 2001–02, child care expenditure increased by 22% in real terms, from \$1,320 million to \$1,607 million.

Over the period 1991–92 to 2001–02, there was a shift from expenditure on service provision to expenditure on measures that reduce the costs of child care for parents. The proportion of Commonwealth expenditure on ‘Other services for families with children’ (which included capital loans, capital grants and upgrades, and operational subsidies) fell from 32% of total expenditure to 11%, while the proportion of expenditure on fee subsidies (Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate prior to July 2000 and Child Care Benefit subsequently) increased from 64% to 80%.

Outcomes

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

The long-term effects of child care on children continue to be the subject of considerable research and debate. One of the main aims of the Commonwealth’s longitudinal study of Australian children, for instance, is to assess the impact of non-parental care on children’s development and wellbeing (see Box 6.1).

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

Accessibility

Unmet demand is an important indicator of the accessibility of child care services. One direct measure of unmet demand comes from the ABS Child Care Survey, which asks parents whether they had wanted to use either some formal child care or additional formal care, but had not done so (ABS 2003b:30).

Between 1993 and 2002, accessibility of child care services improved dramatically, with the number of children for whom parents required some or more formal care dropping from 489,200 (16% of children 0–11) to 174,500 (6%) (Table 6.17). The fall was most marked in the earlier years, but even in the last 3 years to 2002, the number dropped by 13%. Between 1999 and 2002, however, the substantial fall in the numbers of children needing before/after school care, preschool and other formal care was offset by a small increase in the numbers needing care in family day care services.

Table 6.17: Children under 12 years of age for whom parents required some or more formal care, 1993, 1996, 1999 and 2002 ('000)

Main type of (additional) formal care required	1993	1996	1999	2002
Before/after school care	125.1	84.9	62.6	47.8
Long day care centres	63.8	39.0	45.4	46.3
Family day care	60.2	29.0	24.5	29.1
Occasional care	191.8	82.1	43.7	37.6
Preschool	30.0	20.3	11.2	*5.1
Other formal care	18.3	6.4	13.7	8.6
Total children who required (additional) formal care	489.2	261.7	201.1	174.5

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

Source: ABS 2003b.

In 2002, the main reasons for parents not using the formal care they wanted were that care was 'booked out or no places' (35% of children), it was too expensive (17%) and no care existed in the local area or parents had no knowledge of its existence (12%) (ABS 2003b:32). The availability of places was clearly more of an issue than the cost of care. In contrast, the main reasons parents gave in 1999 were that the care available was too expensive (33% of children), there were no places available (14%) and no care existed in the local area or parents had no knowledge of its existence (12%) (ABS 2000:32).

In 2002, there were another 93,300 children whose parents said that they did not want to use any formal care (or any additional care) because of problems with the cost. This was, however, a marked drop from the 159,400 children whose parents gave this response in 1999.

The FaCS National Supply Demand model, which estimated the extent to which Commonwealth-supported services met the demand for work-related child care (see AIHW 2001b:168), has been reviewed and a revised planning model was introduced in July 2003 (FaCS 2002b:81).

Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests that while the level of unmet demand has reduced overall, there is still a shortage of child care places in some areas, both for long day care services and outside school hours care (Cox 2003; Petrys 2003). In the last quarter of 2002, the Commonwealth reallocated around 3,000 outside school hours care places from services that had unused capacity to services that had requested additional places (Anthony 2002d; Roxon 2002). It is also important to note that there is no limit on the number of long day care places that can attract Child Care Benefit and there is some evidence of an oversupply of such places in some areas.

Affordability

The costs of child care for families depend on the fees charged, family income, the number of children in care, the hours of care that they use and the government subsidies that they receive. The affordability of child care is a function of the relationship of cost of child care to parental income. The discussion here will

Box 6.7: Commonwealth Child Care Benefit (CCB)

*Between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2003, where children used **approved** care, families with incomes of \$30,806 or less receive the maximum rate of CCB of \$133 per week for 50 hours of care for one child not at school – or \$2.66 per hour. Above this income level, the CCB tapers down to a minimum rate of \$22.35 per child for 50 hours of care per week – or \$0.44 per hour. Families with one child in care are eligible only for the minimum rate of CCB when their income is \$88,344 or more. The rate of CCB for children at school is 85% of that payable for children not at school. Families with more than one child in care are paid a loaded (additional) rate of CCB, as are families with children using long day care centres and family day care services for part-time care.*

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

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

concentrate on the affordability of long day care services (long day care centres and family day care), since the majority of children in Commonwealth-supported care are using those services (see Table 6.12).

At May 2002, average full-time weekly fees for community and private long day care centres were about the same: \$188 and \$184 per week respectively (Table 6.18). Average fees for family day care services were considerably lower – \$163 for 50 hours of care a week. Average weekly fees varied across the states and territories. They tended to be highest in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales and lowest in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

As noted earlier, the Commonwealth Government provides fee subsidies to make child care more affordable for families. The CCB was introduced in July 2000, as part of the new tax system to improve the affordability of care (Box 6.7). The payment is higher in dollar terms than the fee subsidies that it replaced (Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Rebate), but is simpler to calculate and administer (AIHW 1999a:116–18). The payment is indexed annually by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Despite assistance having been increased, most families receiving the maximum CCB still pay some of the costs of child care, since fees are generally higher than the maximum amount of assistance available. At May 2002, a family with one child in care full-time at a long day care centre and receiving the maximum CCB of \$129 per week for 50 hours of care, would have had child care costs of \$57 per week (\$186 less \$129) (Table 6.18).

Table 6.18: Average full-time weekly fees for Commonwealth-supported long day care, by type of service, May 2002 (\$)

Type of service	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Long day care centres	196	184	172	176	181	186	203	171	186
Community	201	186	167	178	180	185	198	169	188
Private	193	182	173	173	182	189	211	175	184
Family day care	172	156	151	171	176	178	188	155	163

Notes

1. Community = Community-based, state and local government long day care centres. Private = Private-for-profit long day care centres.
2. Data for family day care services are for 50 hours of care per week.

Source: FaCS 2003b.

From 1 July to 30 September 2002, it is estimated that around 534,370 families received the CCB. Of these, about 36% were paid the maximum rate for the number of hours they used and around 14% received the minimum rate, with the remainder receiving part rates (Commonwealth of Australia 2003).

It is important to note that, in 2002, most children in long day care services were not using full-time care—the average hours of attendance for a child in a Commonwealth-supported long day care centre were 19.9 hours per week, and in family day care 18.6 hours per week (SCRCSSP 2003:Table 14A.8). Thus, when examining the affordability of child care, it is more appropriate to look at costs for part-time care.

In 2001, the AIHW examined changes in the affordability of long day care services between 1991 and 2000 (after the introduction of the CCB) (AIHW 2001b). The analysis looked at affordability for five different hypothetical families with one child using 20 hours of paid care a week and with one child using 40 hours of paid care a week. Child care costs (fees charged, less government assistance) as a percentage of disposable income were taken as the indicator of child care affordability. This analysis has now been extended to include May 2002 (Table 6.19).

The affordability of child care services for all types of families improved with the introduction of the CCB (AIHW 2001b:171). Between 2000 and 2002, however, affordability declined for families using all types of long day care services, except for the lowest income families using family day care services (Table 6.19). These families using this type of care continued to pay nothing—because the CCB covered the cost entirely.

Child care became less affordable over this period because fees rose more than the CCB, which is indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Since the increase in fees charged was greatest in private-for-profit centres, the decline in affordability particularly affected parents using these services, especially the lowest income families. In 2002 as in 2000, child care was least affordable for a sole-parent pensioner using 40 hours of care in a community-based centre, with child care costs accounting for 13% of disposable income.

Table 6.19: Cost of child care as a proportion of disposable income, July 2000 and May 2002

Type of service/ family type and income level	20 hours		40 hours	
	2000	2002	2000	2002
Community-based long day care centres				
Sole parent receiving Parenting Payment—Studying	4.8	5.1	12.5	13.0
Sole parent working—0.75 AWE	3.2	3.3	8.3	8.4
Couple family with one income—AWE	3.6	3.8	8.6	9.0
Couple family with two incomes—1.75 AWE	4.5	4.7	9.6	10.0
Couple family with two incomes—2.5 AWE	4.9	5.0	9.9	10.2
Private long day care centres				
Sole parent receiving Parenting Payment—Studying	3.9	4.6	10.6	12.1
Sole parent working—0.75 AWE	2.6	3.0	7.0	7.8
Couple family with one income—AWE	3.0	3.5	7.5	8.5
Couple family with two incomes—1.75 AWE	4.2	4.6	8.9	9.6
Couple family with two incomes—2.5 AWE	4.6	4.9	9.4	9.9
Family day care services				
Sole parent receiving Parenting Payment—Studying	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sole parent working—0.75 AWE	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Couple family with one income—AWE	0.8	0.9	1.7	2.1
Couple family with two incomes—1.75 AWE	3.0	3.3	6.0	6.6
Couple family with two incomes—2.5 AWE	3.9	4.1	7.4	8.4

Notes

1. Gross income includes any earned income and Centrelink payments and allowances. Net income is gross income minus tax and Medicare levy.
2. In couple families with one income, one parent is working, the other studying. In other couple families, both parents are working.
3. For couple families with two incomes, the taxable income split is assumed to be 1:0.75.
4. Average weekly earnings (AWE) at November 2002, were \$688.40.

Sources: ABS 2002e; AIHW 2001c, AIHW analysis of 2002 data.

Quality

Legislative regulations (or funding guidelines) and accreditation (or quality assurance) systems are the two mechanisms for assuring quality in the child care sector. The regulations specify the minimum standards which must be met (or ‘quantifiable inputs’) in order for the service to operate. These standards relate to the physical environment, health and safety, staff-child ratios, staff qualifications and program activities. Licensing provisions exist for many, but not all, types of child care services. Accreditation processes (or quality assurance systems), on the other hand, focus on measuring the quality of aspects of the services that are delivered, for instance staff responsiveness to children in their care (NCAC 2003).

All states and territories license and regulate centre-based long day care and occasional care services. Family day care schemes and/or providers are licensed and regulated in New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. While outside school hours care services are licensed and regulated in the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania are about to introduce licensing. Since child care licensing regulations vary across jurisdictions, in the early 1990s, sets of national standards for long day care centres, family day care and outside school hours care services were developed by the Commonwealth and state/territory

governments and endorsed by the (then) Community Services Ministers Conference. The extent to which these national standards have been implemented varies across jurisdictions.

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for accrediting all Commonwealth-supported long day care centres, family day care schemes and outside school hours care services through its accreditation systems which are administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) (Box 6.8). All services are required to participate in quality improvement processes in order to be approved for the CCB and other relevant Commonwealth funding (NCAC 2003).

Box 6.8: Quality improvement systems

A revised Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for long day care centres was introduced in January 2003 (NCAC 2003). This new system differed from the previous one in three main ways: a reduction in the number of quality care principles (from 52 to 35) against which centres are assessed; a change in the period between reviews, from 1, 2 or 3 years to a standard two and a half years for all centres; and for centres with 30 or more licensed places, a change in the period for accreditation visits from 1 to 2 days.

Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA): Since 1 July 2001, family day care schemes have been required to participate in a quality assurance scheme that was developed in consultation with the family day care sector. The FDCQA follows a similar process to that for long day care centres – services are assessed against 32 family day care quality principles and there is a period of two and a half years between reviews.

Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQ) : From 1 July 2003, outside school hours care services are required to participate in quality assurance systems that have been developed in consultation with the outside school hours care sector. Commonwealth-supported outside school hours care services are required to register to participate in the system by 30 September 2003 in order to be approved for the CCB. Services will be assessed against 30 outside school hours care quality principles, with two and a half years between reviews.

Source: NCAC 2003.

Table 6.20: Accreditation status of Commonwealth-supported long day care centres, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003

Accreditation status	June 1997		July 1999		April 2001		June 2003	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Accredited	2,799	68	3,584	87	3,669	91	3,683	87
Plan of action—not accredited	283	7	269	6	205	5	270	6
Undergoing process ^(a)	1,052	25	289	7	149	4	300	7
Total	4,134	100	4,142	100	4,023	100	4,253	100

(a) Includes in self-study, in review and in moderation or awaiting council decision.

Source: NCAC 2003, NCAC unpublished data.

At June 2003, 87% of Commonwealth supported-long day care centres were accredited and another 7% were undergoing the process of accreditation (Table 6.20). Only 6% of centres were not accredited and were working through a plan of action approved by the NCAC to bring them up to standard. Between June 1997 and June 2003, the proportion of centres that were accredited increased from 68% to 87%, while the proportion undergoing the process of accreditation fell from 25% to 7%.

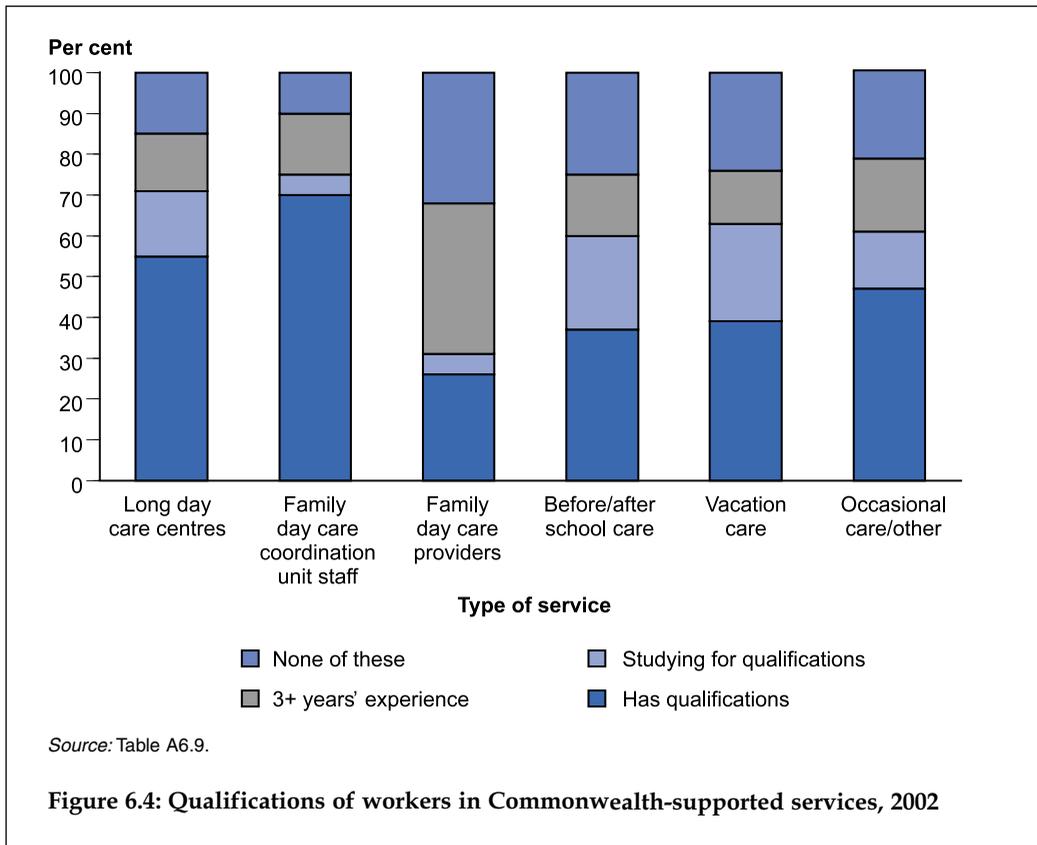
As at June 2003, 13% of the 325 family day care schemes registered with the NCAC for accreditation were accredited and the other 87% were undergoing the process of accreditation.

The quality of care has been shown to be strongly related to whether or not staff working in child care services have had appropriate training in the child care area (Fleer 2002:39). State and territory child care licensing regulations all contain specifications of 'recognised qualifications' for various staffing positions. As noted previously, there are widespread concerns about child care services being able to recruit and keep qualified staff.

Information on 'relevant qualifications' held by child care workers was collected in the Commonwealth Child Care Census for every service type—most of these 'relevant qualifications' are recognised for licensing purposes (Press & Hayes 2000:73–5). While 'relevant qualifications' vary slightly by service type, they generally include qualifications in early childhood and primary teaching, child care, nursing and 'other relevant' areas such as social work and business management.

In 2002 the proportion of workers with relevant qualifications varied considerably among the different types of services (Figure 6.4). For instance, around a quarter (26%) of family day care providers had relevant qualifications compared with over a third of before/after school care workers (37%) and just over half of workers in long day care centres. The proportion with no relevant qualification, but currently studying for one, ranged from 5% in family day care to 24% in vacation care. The proportion who had no relevant qualifications and were not studying for any, but who had worked in the child care sector for more than 3 years, was highest for family day care providers (37%) and lowest for workers in private-for-profit long day care centres (11%).

In-service training is also provided to improve child care workers skills and competencies. In some jurisdictions, it is required under state and territory regulations. In 2002, 60% or more of workers in all types of child care services had undertaken in-service training in the previous 12 months (see Table A6.9). Family day care workers were the most likely to have done so—80% of providers and 86% of coordination unit staff.



6.5 Child protection and out-of-home care services

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

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

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

- 'receiving and responding to reports of concern about children and young people, including investigation and assessment where appropriate;
- providing support services to strengthen the capacity of families to care safely for children;

- initiating intervention, including applying for a care and protection order through a court if necessary and placing children and young people in out-of-home care to secure their safety;
- ensuring the ongoing safety of children and young people by working with families to resolve protective concerns;
- working with families to reunite children (who were removed for safety reasons) with their parents as soon as possible; and
- securing permanent alternative care when children are unable to live with their parents' (SCRCSSP 2003:15.2).

This section examines trends in the number of child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations, children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care over the last 5 years. Some data on trends for Indigenous children are also provided.

Child protection in the new millennium

It has been recognised that a forensic investigation is generally not the most appropriate way of dealing with many of the families reported to child protection authorities. It is also widely understood that child protection is a complex area, usually involving children with a variety of needs, coming from families that have a range of problems (VicDHS 2002). A large number of the reports that come to community services departments are not about child abuse, but about situations in which parents are not coping with their parental responsibilities. These families usually lack the skills and resources to cope with raising a family (AIHW 2001b).

Most of the community services departments have made modifications, sometimes involving the introduction of new legislation, to the way they respond to reports of concerns about children. These changes aim to enhance the safety of children and ensure that the children and their families receive services that meet their needs (SCRCSSP 2003). Where the reports do not involve child maltreatment, children and their families are being referred to family support services rather than being investigated. In some jurisdictions, such as Western Australia and Tasmania, these cases are streamed to family support services instead of being recorded as a notification.

The community services departments provide a range of family support services. These may include information and referral, education/skill development, counselling, mediation and therapy, residential and in-home support, and advocacy (AIHW 2001a).

In an effort to keep children with their families, where this is appropriate, the departments also provide intensive family support services. These provide similar strategies to family support services in general but are more intensive in nature—they average at least 4 hours per week and last for up to 6 months.

Unlike general family support services which can be provided at any time during the process, that is prior to or post notification, intensive family support services are only provided once a child is in the child protection system. They are aimed at preventing the separation of children from their families due to child protection concerns or to reunify families where separation has already occurred (SCRCSSP 2003).

Box 6.9: Definitions of notification, investigation and substantiation

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

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

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

Data sources

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has been responsible for collecting national child protection data since the early 1990s. The data are, however, limited to three main areas of child protection:

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

In addition, some preliminary national data on Intensive Family Support Services have been collected since 1999–00. These are specialist services that seek to prevent the separation of children from their families, or to reunify families where separation has already occurred. The data are fairly limited and not all jurisdictions can provide all the information. There are no other national data on family support services or on the other work undertaken by child protection workers to keep children safe.

The national child protection data were extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory community services departments according to definitions and counting rules agreed to by the departments and the Institute. For more information about child protection processes, refer to *Child Protection Australia 2001–02* (AIHW 2003).

Children who are in need of protection

The purpose of child protection services is to respond to reports of concerns about children and to identify children who are in need of protection from abuse, neglect or harm. Concerns about children can be brought to the attention of the community services departments by parents, other relatives or children themselves, by people outside the family or by professionals who have contact with children and families.

Many of the families involved with the community services departments have complex needs and experience a range of problems. These may include low socioeconomic status, residential instability, crowded dwellings, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse and psychiatric disability (Prent & Lewis 1996; Weatherburn & Lind 1997).

For example, a 2002 Victorian study examined the characteristics of parents of children in substantiated cases. It was found that 73% of the parents of children in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect had at least one issue or problem. Of these, 52% experienced domestic violence, 33% substance abuse, 31% alcohol abuse, 19% had a psychiatric disability, 4% a physical disability and 3% an intellectual disability. At least two of these characteristics were experienced by 44% of the parents (VicDHS 2002).

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

The Victorian study, for example, found that families who were investigated by child protection services were likely to be on a pension, benefit or low income (75%) and likely to be in a sole-parent family (45%) (VicDHS 2002). A South Australian study (Hood 1998), examining referrals from the child protection services to the Women's and Children's Hospital, found that 82% of the children referred lived in areas in the two lowest socioeconomic clusters. A New South Wales study also found that reports (or notifications) of child abuse and neglect to the Department of Community Services were correlated with poverty and unemployment (Weatherburn & Lind 1997).

The high rates of Indigenous children in the child protection system are consistent with these findings. The national data show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are up to eight times more likely than other Australian children to be the subject of a child protection substantiation, and are six times more likely to be in out-of-home care (AIHW 2003). The intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture, poor socioeconomic status and cultural differences in child-rearing practices are important reasons for this over-representation (HREOC 1997).

Family disruption appears to be another important factor that is associated with involvement in the child protection system. The national data show that children from one-parent families and from step or blended families are over-represented in child protection substantiations (AIHW 2003). This is likely to be related to the compounding stresses that sole parents may face. For example, one in five sole parents live in poverty (Harding et al. 2001).

Trends in the use of child protection services

The Institute has national data on the number of child protection investigations and substantiations for the years 1990–91 to 2001–02, and on the number of notifications for the years from 1995–96 to 2001–02 (see Box 6.9 for definitions of these terms).

Before examining national trends it is important to note that each jurisdiction has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to child protection, and the data it provides reflect some important variations in what it does and in how it counts child

protection matters. These differences are apparent in the variation in the rates of children aged 0–16 years in child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations.

In relation to substantiations in 2001–02, for example, rates ranged from 8.3 per 1,000 children in Queensland to 1.4 per 1,000 in Tasmania (Table 6.21). One of the reasons for the low rate in Tasmania is that more of the less serious cases are channelled towards family support services instead of being recorded as a notification and are therefore not investigated or substantiated. In Queensland, there has been a broadening of what is classified as child abuse and neglect, which contributed to an increase in the rate of substantiations. For more information about the differences between jurisdictions, see *Comparability of Child Protection Data* (AIHW 1999b) and *Child Protection Australia* (for example, AIHW 2003). As the policies and practices have changed so markedly since the Institute began collecting the national data, only trends in the past 5 years will be examined.

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

The national trend in notifications is one of increasing numbers between 1997–98 and 2001–02 (Figure 6.5). Across Australia, the number of notifications increased by 40% over this 5-year period to reach 137,938 in 2001–02.

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

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

Not all notifications are investigated. Some do not warrant an investigation, some are dealt with by other means, such as family support or referral to another service, and some are unable to be investigated as the information is incomplete or the child is unable to be located.

Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, the number of investigations across Australia increased by 31% to reach over 80,000. While the number of substantiations also rose over the past 5 years, from 26,025 to 30,473 (17%), the increase was not so striking when compared with notifications and investigations.

The national rate per 1,000 children aged 0–16 years in notifications increased by 28%, from 17.1 in 1997–98 to 21.9 in 2001–02 (Table 6.21). However, the rates of children who were the subject of an investigation or of a substantiation rose only 12% and 14% respectively. This indicates that while notifications to community services departments increased considerably, the number of cases that the departments investigated and also the number of children for whom there was substantiated harm or risk of harm did not. This was probably due to the shifts in child protection policies and practices which included channelling the less serious cases to family support services rather than to a forensic investigation.

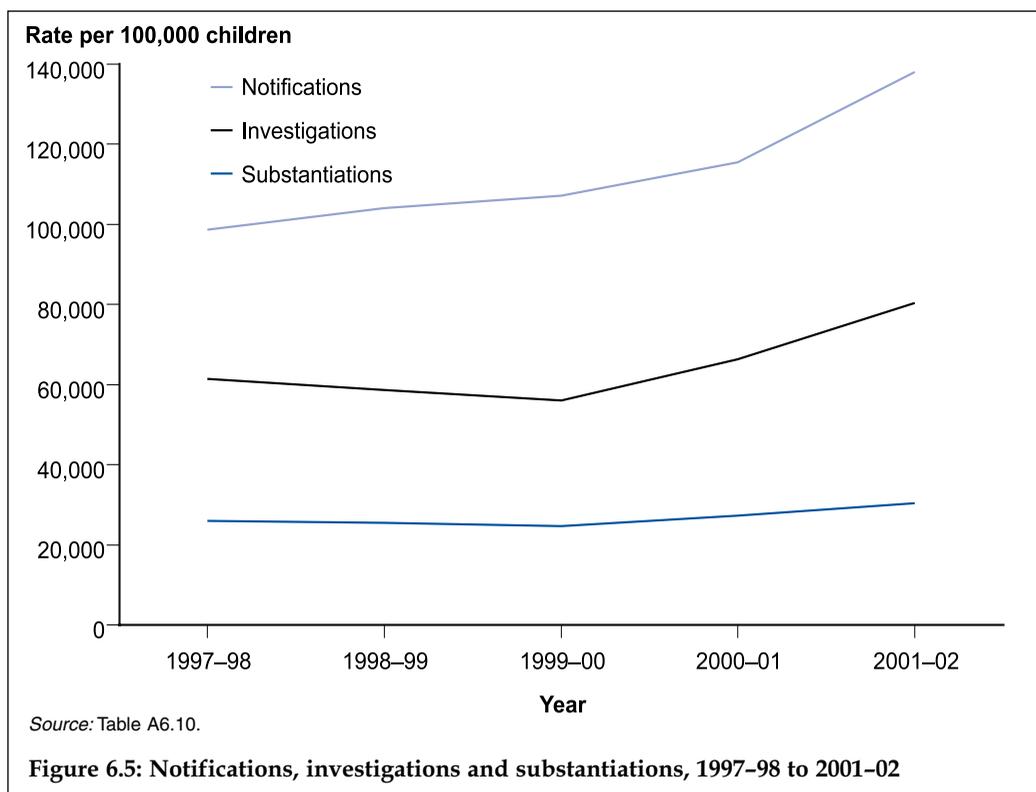


Table 6.21: Rates of children aged 0-16 years who were the subject of a notification, investigation and substantiation, per 1,000 children, 1997-98 to 2001-02

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^(a)	Total
Notifications									
1997-98	17.1	24.0	15.3	4.9	22.5	7.1	12.0	10.9	17.1
1998-99	16.9	24.7	16.5	5.1	25.3	3.5	17.3	n.a.	17.8
1999-00	16.4	24.9	16.9	5.2	28.5	2.1	13.0	20.3	17.9
2000-01	20.7	25.7	18.8	5.7	21.4	2.7	9.2	20.9	19.5
2001-02	25.3	25.9	21.9	5.9	23.3	4.0	9.2	23.5	21.9
Investigations									
1997-98	10.8	11.1	10.2	4.2	10.5	4.8	9.2	10.5	9.9
1998-99	9.2	11.1	9.3	4.7	11.5	3.1	15.8	n.a.	9.4
1999-00	8.0	10.2	9.3	4.7	11.4	1.9	10.4	10.0	8.6
2000-01	10.8	10.7	11.0	4.8	11.9	2.0	7.0	11.7	10.0
2001-02	13.3	10.4	12.3	4.8	12.7	3.3	6.2	13.4	11.1
Substantiations									
1997-98	5.0	5.9	5.1	2.4	4.7	1.1	4.7	5.5	4.9
1998-99	4.5	6.3	5.1	2.5	5.2	1.1	5.2	n.a.	4.8
1999-00	3.9	6.3	5.6	2.3	5.1	0.7	2.6	6.2	4.7
2000-01	4.4	6.3	7.4	2.5	5.0	1.9	2.8	5.8	5.3
2001-02	4.8	6.5	8.3	2.4	5.3	1.4	2.7	5.8	5.6

(a) Northern Territory could not provide data for 1998-99 and was not included in the totals for that year.

Sources: AIHW 2003; AIHW unpublished data.

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

In particular, policy changes within jurisdictions can have a major impact on the numbers of children in the child protection system. For example, after the proclamation of the New South Wales *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* in December 2000, the rate per 1,000 children in child protection notifications increased considerably, from 16.4 in 1999–00 to 25.3 in 2001–02. According to the New South Wales Department of Community Services there are three main reasons for this:

- the DoCS Helpline was introduced, which is a centralised intake system;
- the scope of mandatory reporting was widened to include anyone who works with children; and
- DoCS provided training and awareness for the new legislation as well as ongoing community awareness programs (NSWDCS 2001).

While the rates in New South Wales increased by more than 50% between 1999–00 and 2001–02 for both notifications and investigations, the rate of substantiations rose only by 23%.

Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory have also proclaimed new Acts during the past 5 years. Since the proclamation of new legislation in Queensland, the rates have increased. The reasons for the rise in notifications and investigations are similar to those in New South Wales, namely a more centralised intake system and the employment of more staff. The increase in substantiations may be due to a broadening of what is defined as child abuse, neglect or harm. In the Australian Capital Territory, on the other hand, where rates decreased markedly, there is now an increased emphasis on family support and prevention services, which means more children and families are diverted to these types of services rather than being recorded as a notification. These are examples of how the trends in the child protection data are more an indication of how the jurisdictions deal with children who are notified to the department, than of changes to the levels of harm to children in the community.

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

Children on care and protection orders

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

Box 6.10: Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

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

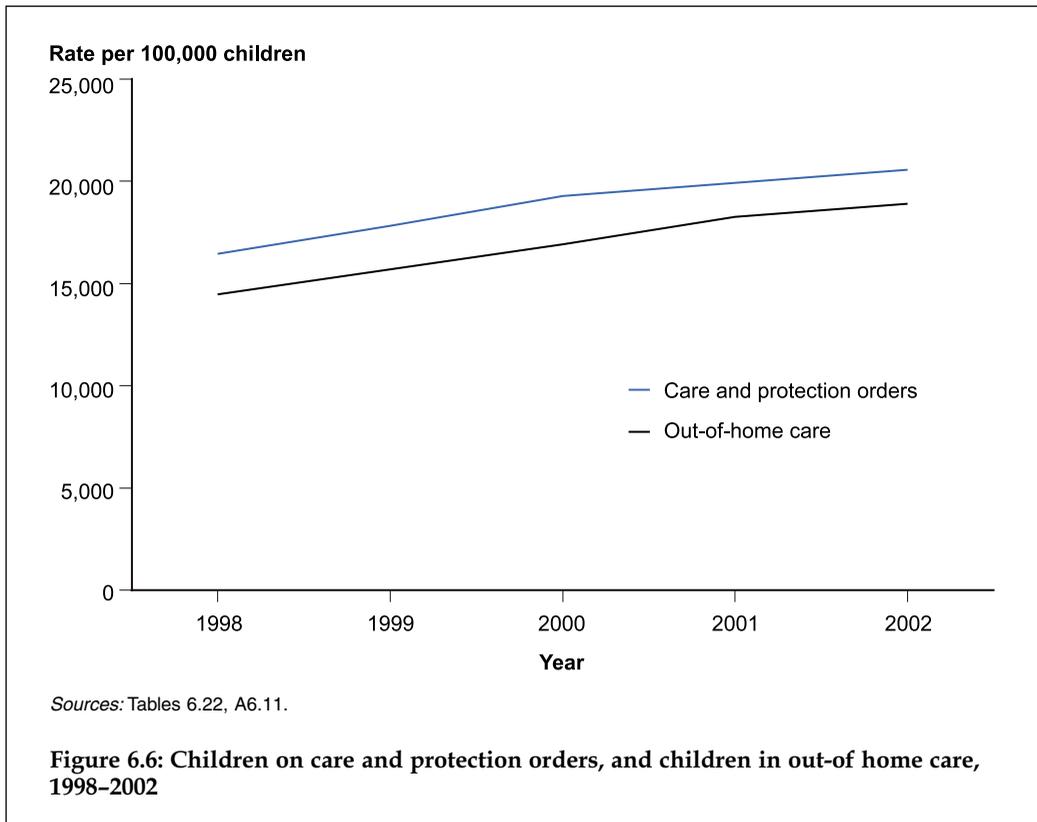
Out-of-home care is defined as out-of-home overnight care for children and young people under 18 years of age where the state or territory makes a financial payment. It includes residential care, foster care and relative/kinship care. Children in out-of-home care can be placed in a variety of living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

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

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

There was a 25% increase in the number of children on care and protection orders across Australia between 30 June 1998 and 30 June 2002, from 16,449 to 20,557 (Figure 6.6). The rate of children on orders also rose from 3.5 to 4.3 per 1,000 children over the same period (AIHW 2003).

The number of children on orders increased between 1998 and 2002 in all jurisdictions except Tasmania. Increases in numbers were particularly large in Western Australia (over 70%), in the Northern Territory (41%) and in New South Wales (37%) (AIHW 2003:33).



Children in out-of-home care

While children may be placed in out-of-home care as well as on a care and protection order, the two data collections are separate (see Box 6.10 for definitions). The trend in out-of-home care has been one of increasing numbers of children using these services. Between June 1998 and June 2002, the number of children in out-of-home care in Australia rose from 14,470 to 18,880, an increase of 30% (Table 6.22, Figure 6.6). The rate of children in out-of-home care also increased over this period, from 3.1 per 1,000 to 3.9 per 1,000 (AIHW 2003).

The number of children in out-of-home care rose in all jurisdictions between 1998 and 2002. There were particularly large increases in New South Wales, where the numbers grew by 44%, and in Queensland and Western Australia (39% and 36% respectively).

There is likely to be a range of complex reasons for the growth in the number of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care since 1996. At the broad level it indicates that there are increasing numbers of children whose families are considered unable to adequately care for them. This may be due to greater pressures on families through, for example, increases in joblessness, family disruption, substance abuse or family violence. The rise is consistent with the higher number of child protection notifications that occurred in most jurisdictions during the same period.

Table 6.22: Number of children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care, 30 June 1998–2002

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
1998	5,603	3,615	2,346	1,093	1,055	442	179	137	14,470
1999	6,359	3,581	2,613	1,192	1,045	533	174	177	15,674
2000	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923
2001	7,786	3,882	3,011	1,436	1,175	572	215	164	18,241
2002	8,084	3,918	3,257	1,494	1,196	544	224	163	18,880

Source: AIHW 2003.

Types of out-of-home care

There was some change in the types of out-of-home care in which children were placed between 30 June 1998 and 30 June 2002. The number of children in residential care fell markedly over this period, from 1,415 to 1,057 (Table 6.23). This decrease continues the longer term trend towards the deinstitutionalisation of children that began in the late 1960s (see Johnstone 2001). It should be noted that residential facilities nowadays are generally small, with less than 10 children living together. They can enable large sibling groups to be placed together and can cater for children with complex needs. Children in residential care also tend to be older.

Over the same period, there was a 36% increase in the number of children who were in home-based care arrangements, from 12,661 to 17,271. This reflects the policy of placing children, particularly young children, in a home-based rather than a residential environment where possible.

Table 6.23: Children in out-of-home care, by type of care, 30 June 1998–2002

Type of care ^(a)	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
	Number				
Foster care	8,089	8,212	n.a.	9,429	9,668
Relative/kinship care	4,446	5,254	n.a.	6,940	7,439
Other home-based care	126	183	n.a.	192	164
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>12,661</i>	<i>13,649</i>	<i>15,169</i>	<i>16,561</i>	<i>17,271</i>
Residential care	1,415	1,314	1,222	1,177	1,057
Independent living ^(b)	183	218	208	203	221
Other ^(c)	211	316	324	300	331
Total	14,470	15,497	16,923	18,241	18,880
	Per cent				
Foster care	56	53	n.a.	52	51
Relative/kinship care	31	34	n.a.	38	39
Other home-based care	—	1	n.a.	1	1
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>91</i>
Residential care	10	9	7	6	6
Independent living ^(b)	1	1	1	1	1
Other ^(c)	2	2	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

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

(b) Includes unknown living arrangements.

(c) Excludes 177 children from the Northern Territory because data on type of care could not be provided.

Sources: AIHW 1999c, 2000b, 2001d, 2002b, 2003.

The type of home-based care has changed in the past 5 years. Although foster care is still the main type of out-of-home care, the proportion of children in foster care has fallen, from 56% to 51%. On the other hand, the proportion of children living with relatives/kin increased from 31% to 39% for the same period. This may be the result of a number of factors, for example, a policy shift to enable children to stay with their extended families wherever practical and a decrease in the availability of foster parents.

Trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system has been well documented. For example, in Victoria and Western Australia in 2001–02, their rates in substantiations were 8 times higher than for other children (AIHW 2003).

This section discusses trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection substantiations, on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care. The quality of the data on Indigenous status is one of the major issues to be considered when analysing trends for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children since data quality varies across jurisdictions and over time. Although the recording of Indigenous status still remains an issue, increases in the recorded number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system over time may therefore be due to improvements in the quality of the data and to greater self-identification, rather than to an actual increase in number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Substantiations

The available data indicate that the number of substantiations involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children increased by 28%, from 3,205 in 1997–98 to 4,095 in 2001–02 (Table 6.24). This occurred in all jurisdictions except Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. In some jurisdictions the numbers fluctuated over the period, for example in Queensland the number fell between 1997–98 and 1999–00 but then rose substantially between 2000–01 and 2001–02. In South Australia and Western Australia, in contrast, the numbers increased steadily over the entire period.

The pattern of substantiated abuse and neglect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children differs from the pattern for other children. Indigenous children were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation of neglect than other children. For example, in Western Australia, 50% of Indigenous children in substantiations were the subject of a substantiation of neglect, compared with 24% of other children. In Queensland, the corresponding percentages were 50% and 37% respectively (AIHW 2003:18).

Table 6.24: Number of child protection substantiations involving Indigenous children, 1997–98 to 2001–02

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
1997–98	749	514	1,085	302	330	3	44	178	3,205
1998–99 ^(a)	1,026	n.a.	856	327	337	8	25	n.a.	n.a.
1999–00	839	629	770	365	435	5	19	194	3,256
2000–01	1,023	650	946	383	438	2	24	167	3,633
2001–02	1,101	630	1,206	426	483	2	11	236	4,095

Sources: AIHW 1999c, 2000b, 2001d, 2002b, 2003.

Table 6.25: Indigenous status of children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care, at 30 June 1998–02

	Children on care and protection orders			Children in out-of-home care		
	Indigenous	Other children	Total	Indigenous	Other children	Total
1998	2,868	13,581	16,449	2,634	11,836	14,470
1999 ^(a)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2000	3,861	15,401	19,262	3,496	13,427	16,923
2001	4,146	15,637	19,783	4,037	14,168	18,205
2002	4,264	16,293	20,557	4,199	14,681	18,880

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

Source: AIHW 1999c, 2000b, 2001d, 2002b, 2003.

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

Between June 1998 and June 2002, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders increased by nearly 50%, from 2,868 to 4,264 (Table 6.25). The number of other children on care and protection orders rose by only 20% over the same period.

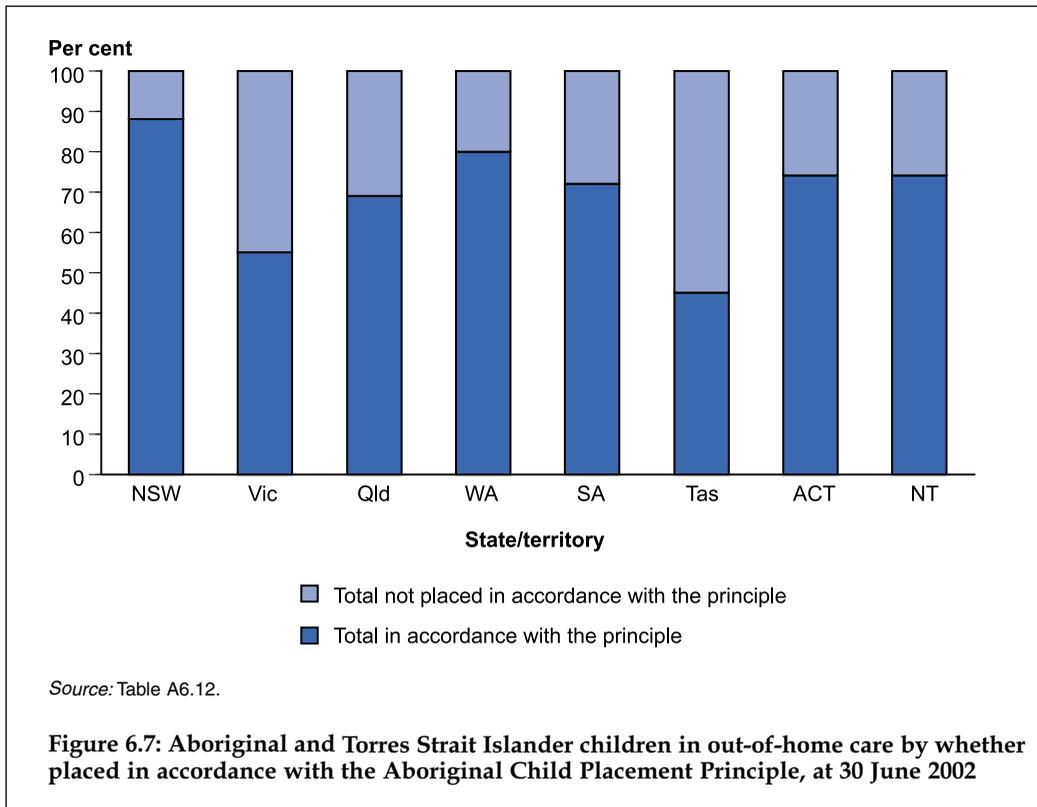
The trend for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was also one of increasing numbers, rising from 2,634 in 1998 to 4,199 in 2002 (59% increase). In comparison, the number of other children in out-of-home rose by 24%.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle outlines a preference for the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they are placed outside their family (Lock 1997:50). The Principle has the following order of preference for placement:

- with the child’s extended family
- within the child’s Indigenous community
- with other Indigenous people.

All jurisdictions have adopted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle either in legislation or policy. The impact of the principle is reflected in the relatively high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives (Figure 6.7).



At 30 June 2002, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed in accordance with the principle ranged from 88% in New South Wales to 45% in Tasmania. The relatively low proportion of children who were placed with an Indigenous carer or relative in Tasmania is probably related to the small size of the Indigenous population as well as issues related to the identification of Indigenous status in that state (AIHW 2003).

6.6 Adoptions

When an adoption order is granted, the legal relationship between the child and the biological parents is severed. The legal rights of the adopted child are as if he or she had been born to the adoptive parents, and the legal rights that exist from birth with regard to the birth parents (inheritance and name, for instance) are removed. A new birth certificate is issued to the child bearing the name(s) of his or her adoptive parent(s) as the legal parent(s), and the new name of the child, where a change has occurred (AIHW 2002d).

In Australia, each state and territory has responsibility for all aspects of adoptions within its jurisdiction, and has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to adoption. This section examines adoptions between 1997–98 and 2001–02. Data are also provided on the adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Box 6.11: Categories of adoption used in the national data collection

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

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

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

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

Data sources

As with child protection, the community services departments in each state and territory fund the Institute to collect, analyse and publish national data on adoptions. These data come from the administrative systems of each state and territory community services department. The categories used to classify adoptions in the national data collection are outlined in Box 6.11. For more information about the data and definitions, refer to the *Adoptions Australia* series (for example, AIHW 2002d).

Trends in adoption

The number of adoptions in Australia has fluctuated in the last 5 years, with no real trend apparent. Overall, however, the numbers have fallen, from 577 in 1997–98 to 561 in 2001–02 (Table 6.26). This decrease continues the trend that began in the early 1970s when there were nearly 10,000 adoptions in Australia (AIHW 2002d).

The decrease in recent years was primarily due to the fall in the number of adoptions of Australian-born children—both local adoptions (previously referred to as 'adoptions by non-relatives') and 'known' child adoptions (previously referred to as 'adoptions by relatives'). The small number of local placement adoptions is attributable to the decrease in the number of Australian-born babies who are available for adoption. Factors that contribute to this decrease include the availability of more effective birth control and changed community attitudes to single parents. There is also a greater use of guardianship and custody orders for children who are living with relatives/kin or carers—such as the permanent care order in Victoria—instead of adoption.

Table 6.26: Number of adoptions in Australia, by type of adoption, 1997–98 to 2001–02

	Adoptions of Australian children by non-relatives	Adoptions of Australian children by relatives	Intercountry adoptions	Total
1997–98	178	154	245	577
	Local placement adoptions	'Known' child adoptions		
1998–99	127	172	244	543
1999–00	106	159	301	566
2000–01	85	140	289	514
2001–02	107	160	294	561

Note: From 1998–99 the categories for adoptions were changed. Carers who had a previous relationship to the child were included with adoptions by step-parents and other relatives in the category 'known' child adoptions. Prior to 1998–99 adoptions by carers were included in the category 'adoptions by non-relatives' (see Box 6.11).

Source: AIHW 2002d.

Local placement adoptions

The way that local placement adoptions are conducted has undergone major changes since the 1990s. To a varying degree, in different jurisdictions, adoption has changed from a guarded practice, where files were sealed and parties to the adoption had no contact with each other, to an open practice where each party to the adoption can have some say in what happens to the child. AIHW started collecting information on the level of contact in 1998–99. These data indicated that most local placement adoptions involved agreement to some type of information exchange or contact between the parties. The proportion of relinquishing parents requesting 'no contact' decreased from 10% in 1998–99 to 6% in 2001–02 (Table 6.27).

In addition, a large area of activity for community services departments, in relation to adoption, is in assisting people who were party to an adoption prior to 'open' adoption practices to gain information about their adoption. In all jurisdictions, people party to an adoption can apply for either identifying or non-identifying information regarding the adoption. This may lead to contact between the parties, for example between an adoptee and their birth mother. If a party to the adoption wishes to remain anonymous, a veto may be lodged which makes it illegal for the other parties to either gain information and/or have contact. Such vetoes are not available in Victoria. In 2001–02, there were 4,159 information applications lodged in Australia, compared with 88 contact and information vetoes (AIHW 2002d).

Table 6.27: Local placement adoptions, by type of agreement between parties to the adoption, 1998–99 to 2001–02

Type of agreement	1998–99		1999–00		2000–01		2001–02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Contact and information exchange	23	32	46	74	46	64	75	79
Contact only	1	1	—	—	2	3	1	1
Information exchange only	41	57	11	18	16	26	13	14
No contact	7	10	5	8	5	7	6	6
Unknown	55	..	20	..	7	..	2	..
Not applicable	0	..	24	..	9	..	10	..
Total	127	100	106	100	85	100	107	100

Sources: AIHW 2000c, 2001e, 2002c, 2002d.

‘Known’ child adoptions

The number of ‘known’ child adoptions decreased by 14% between 1998–99 (when ‘known’ child adoptions were first counted) and 2001–02 (see Table 6.26). Most ‘known’ child adoptions over this period were adoptions by step-parents (69%) who wished to legally incorporate the child into the new family, but this practice has become less common (AIHW 2002d). This has occurred during a period when the number of step-families has increased, indicating that the legal status of children in step-families is less likely to be changed than in previous years. This has been a policy shift by the community services departments.

There were also 172 (or 27% of all ‘known’ child adoptions) children adopted by carers between 1998–99 and 2001–02 (AIHW 2002d). Most of these children were in New South Wales where the new legislation encourages the use of permanency planning, particularly for children in long-term out-of-home care.

Adoptions by relatives, other than step-parents, are generally discouraged because of the confusion and distortion that may occur to biological relationships. There were 16 adoptions by relatives other than step-parents between 1998–99 and 2001–02 (AIHW 2002d). When children need to be placed in the care of relatives other than parents, most jurisdictions have policies that promote the use of guardianship or custody orders rather than adoption (Stonehouse 1992).

Intercountry adoptions

The number of intercountry adoptions increased by 20% between 1997–98 and 2001–02 from 245 to 294 adoptions (Table 6.26). This is likely to be related to continuing decreases in the number of local children available for adoption. In addition, the opening of adoption in some countries, such as China, has led to an increase in the number of these adoptions.

An important development in relation to intercountry adoptions is the ratification by Australia of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoptions in December 1998. The Convention streamlines the processes required for intercountry adoptions and establishes uniform procedures to be followed by the countries who are parties to the convention (see AIHW 2002d). As at August 2003, 40 countries have ratified, and 9 countries have signed but not yet ratified, the Convention. This number is likely to increase over the next few years.

In December 1999, Australia and China signed a bilateral agreement that allows Australian residents to adopt children from China. Since then, there have been 55 adoptions from China (Table 6.28).

Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, the majority of children in intercountry adoptions came from South Korea (28%), followed by Ethiopia (14%), India (13%) and Thailand (11%). The number of children who are adopted is determined by the number of children that overseas countries allocate for adoption by Australian parents, rather than the policies of Australian community services departments.

Table 6.28: Intercountry adoptions, by country of origin, 1997–98 to 2001–02

Country of origin	Number	Per cent	Country of origin	Number	Per cent
South Korea	384	28	Mauritius	29	2
Ethiopia	190	14	Taiwan	28	2
India	175	13	Guatemala	24	2
Thailand	147	11	Other ^(b)	24	2
Romania	82	6	Hong Kong	23	2
Colombia	66	5	Bolivia	22	2
Philippines	63	5	Sri Lanka	18	1
China ^(a)	55	4	Total	1,373	100
Fiji	43	3			

(a) Adoptions of children from China are counted from 1999–00.

(b) Includes: Canada, Croatia, Honduras, Lebanon, Macedonia, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Tonga, Uganda and the USA.

Source: Unpublished AIHW data.

Adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Between 1997–98 and 2001–02, there were 19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children adopted in Australia (AIHW 2003). The relatively low number of Indigenous adoptions is because it is recognised that the practice of adoption may not be appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child is orphaned or abandoned, the role of caregiver is traditionally assumed by an appropriate member of the community, without a formal adoption (Boss 1992).

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, which outlines a preference for the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they are placed outside their family, applies to adoption as well as to out-of-home care (Lock 1997). In 12 of the 19 adoptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children between 1997–98 and 2001–02, the adoptive parents were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or relatives (AIHW 2003).

6.7 Data development

Child care and preschool services

Data development within the children's (child care and preschool) services field has made significant progress over the last few years. The AIHW and the Children's Services Data Working Group (Children's Services DWG) of the National Community Services Information Management Group have continued working on the development of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (Children's Services NMDS).

In October 2001, the Children's Services DWG agreed to undertake a pilot test of the first stage of the data set in 2002, with the AIHW coordinating this work. The main aim of the pilot test was to measure the feasibility of the proposed data collection, including

the scope of the collection and the set of data items, and its potential to produce nationally consistent, comparable, comprehensive and useful data for child care and preschool services.

Members of the Children's Services DWG recruited service providers willing to participate in the pilot test. It was decided that it was important to represent the complexity of children's services delivery in selecting the outlets. The service providers chosen thus varied by 'type of funded service', service delivery model (fixed or mobile), service delivery setting (centre, school or home-based) and geographic location (capital city, provincial town, rural and remote). Some services specifically for Indigenous children were also included in the outlet selection.

Following the field test conducted in 2000, it had been agreed that the data collection would be structured around the services offered to children, rather than the types of funded and/or licensed services. Thus, rather than basing the collection forms on 'funded service type', three data collection forms were developed based on service delivery mode and setting—Centre-based, Family Day Care/In-Home Care, and Mobile. The same questions were generally used in each type of form, but some were specific to the service delivery mode or setting.

The pilot test was conducted in mid-August 2002. Forty-three service providers across all states and territories participated, with a total of 3,000 children using their services and 200 workers/caregivers providing the services.

Following the pilot test, the AIHW drafted a report and presented the findings to the Children's Services DWG. The pilot test specifically confirmed that the Children's Services NMDS could produce good quality national data on child care and preschool services across Australia. It was feasible to use the same forms and the same questions for service providers offering different types of funded services (for instance, long day care centres and preschools), even where funding came from different jurisdictions and different departments within the one jurisdiction. Although concerns had previously been expressed about the potential to collect information on individual children and individual workers (rather than aggregate data), all service providers reported the data in this form. It appeared, however, that some modifications would need to be made to the data set. While basing the data collection on 'services offered to children' worked well when collecting information on children and workers, it appeared that there is a need to structure information by 'funded service type' when collecting data on service provision.

The Children's Services DWG is currently considering how to progress the development and implementation of a national children's services data collection.

Child protection

Since 2000, the National Child Protection and Support Services data group has been developing a national reporting framework. This framework aims to more accurately reflect the current responses of states and territories to child protection and child concern reports. It will also aim to increase the consistency and comparability of the reported data (AIHW 2001b).

In August 2002, the framework was endorsed by the data group on behalf of the jurisdictions. The next stage of progressing this work will be the development of a data dictionary. This will continue during 2003–04.

Juvenile justice

Background

Development of comparable national juvenile justice data has for some time been recognised as a priority in the community service and justice areas. As a result, in April 1999, the Community Services Ministers Advisory Council (CSMAC) agreed to provide some funding towards the establishment of a National Minimum Data Set for Juvenile Justice (Juvenile Justice NMDS).

In early 2000, the AIHW was invited to undertake the first stage of the project—reporting to both the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators (AJJA) and the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG). This initial stage involved determining the scope of the Juvenile Justice NMDS and developing a data model, data items and data definitions. It also involved formulating recommendations on how the data set should be implemented. A reference group with representatives from all states and territories, the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Queensland Criminal Justice Commission was established to provide input and guidance for this initial stage. The outcome, including a Draft Juvenile Justice Data Dictionary, is documented in the *Report on the Development of a Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set* (AIHW 2001f).

The Juvenile Justice NMDS and the recommendations in the report were endorsed by the AJJA, the NCSIMG and CSMAC in early 2001. AJJA agreed to continue to fund the AIHW to manage the testing and further development of the data set and to develop national juvenile justice indicators. The Juvenile Justice Data Working Group was established later that year to work with the AIHW on the second stage of this project. The working group has representatives from all jurisdictions (the departments responsible for juvenile justice), the Australian Institute of Criminology, the ABS, the AIHW and the Department of Family and Community Services.

The Juvenile Justice NMDS

In developing the Juvenile Justice NMDS, the aim was to establish a national unit record data collection that provides more complete and comparable data on the clients of juvenile justice departments than is currently available. It includes data items to facilitate the collection of basic information on the characteristics of juvenile justice clients (i.e. young people under the supervision or case management of the juvenile justice department in each jurisdiction as a result of having committed or allegedly committed an offence). Information on their age, sex, Indigenous status, and last known home address can be recorded. The data set is also designed to collect information on the episodes or periods of supervision or case management of these clients. As a result, it can indicate the movement of young people into and out of the supervision of the departments, the length of time on supervision, and progressions through the juvenile justice system to more serious types of sentences (for example, from probation to detention). The data set in its current form is limited in its scope and coverage to those

young people who are clients of juvenile justice departments. This is only a small proportion of young people who come into contact with the broader juvenile justice system. It is hoped that work can be undertaken in the future to improve the national comparability of police and court data.

Current status

The Juvenile Justice NMDS is still in draft form. Before its implementation as a national data collection, it is vital that the agreed data items and definitions be fully tested to ensure that they are meaningful, unambiguous and able to be collected. To this end, field testing of the data set was undertaken in early 2002 and a full-scale pilot test is currently being conducted in all jurisdictions.

A final report, including details of the outcome of the pilot test, recommendations on implementation and detailed national juvenile justice indicators, is due to be presented to the AJJA by the AIHW in November 2003.

6.8 Conclusion

Over the last decade, there have been ongoing changes in family structures and patterns that have implications for children's and family services. There were decreases in marriage rates at younger ages and in fertility rates, further delays in family formation, and increases in the number of children born outside marriage. There were increases in both the number of sole-parent families and the number of families with no parent in employment. Family assistance underwent a fundamental restructure in 2000, with the introduction of two new payments, Family Tax Benefit, Parts A and B. The vast majority of parents receive these payments fortnightly from Centrelink rather than at the end of the year through the tax system. A new payment—the Baby Bonus—provides tax relief to families with a new baby.

The number of children using child care changed little between 1993 and 2002, but there was a shift from informal to formal care use. The number of Commonwealth-supported service providers and child care places increased substantially between 1991 and 2001, with the number of outside school hours care places growing at a faster rate than other types of places in the last year (2000–01). Although the number of child care workers has grown in recent years, supply does not appear to have kept up with demand.

Commonwealth expenditure on child care services more than doubled in real terms between 1991–92 and 1998–99 and then increased by 22% between 1999–00 and 2001–02. Between 1991–92 and 2001–02, there was a shift from Commonwealth expenditure on child care service provision (operational subsidies and capital funding) to expenditure on measures that reduce the costs of child care for parents (fee subsidies). In 2001–02, 80% of expenditure was on the Child Care Benefit.

The introduction of the Child Care Benefit in July 2000 improved the affordability of child care and the utilisation of services. Unmet demand for formal care fell between 1999 and 2002. Affordability fell slightly between July 2000 and May 2002. A new accreditation system for family day care services was introduced in July 2001, a revised accreditation system for Commonwealth-supported long day care centres in January 2003 and a new accreditation system for outside school hours care services in July 2003.

Child protection is a dynamic area, with policies and procedures constantly evolving. While this makes it difficult to interpret long-term trends, it is still clear that the number of children in the child protection system is increasing. As the numbers of children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care increased by 25% and 30% respectively, there is an indication that a growing number of parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children. These families often suffer from a myriad of problems which may include low socioeconomic status, unemployment, residential instability, crowded dwellings, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse, and psychiatric disability.

The decrease in adoptions over the past 5 years was primarily due to the fall in the number of adoptions of Australian-born children—both local adoptions and ‘known’ child adoptions. The small number of local adoptions is attributable to the decline in the number of Australian-born babies who are available for adoption. There was an increase in the number of intercountry adoptions over the same period, with most of the children being adopted from South Korea, Ethiopia and India.

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