



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare**

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# **Implementation of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set**

## **A feasibility study**

**A report to Community and Disability Services  
Ministers' Advisory Council**

**March 2009**

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## **Victoria**

- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

## **Queensland**

- Department of Communities

## **Western Australia**

- Department for Communities
- Department of Education and Training

## **South Australia**

- Department of Education and Children's services

## **Tasmania**

- Department of Education

## **Australian Capital Territory**

- Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services
- Department of Education and Training

## **Northern Territory**

- Department of Health and Community Services
- Department of Employment, Education and Training

This study was funded by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC). The AIHW was commissioned to undertake this work.

The AIHW project team consisted of Cynthia Kim, Alex Wahlin, Liz Treglown and John Sant.

# Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AGCCCS	Australian Government Census of Child Care Services
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CCB	Child Care Benefits
CCMS	Child Care Management System
CDSMAC	Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council
COAG	The Council of Australian Governments
CSDWG	Children's Services Data Working Group
CSMAC	Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council
CSNMDS	Children's Services National Minimum Data Set
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
FaCSIA	Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NCSIMG	National Community Services Information Management Group
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
ROGS	Report on Government Services
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

# Preface

Nationally consistent information on child care and preschool remains a significant data gap in Australia. Ten years ago, work began on developing agreed data items that would lead to consistent national reporting of key areas of interest for monitoring and reporting on children's services. The Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS) was developed and signed off by all jurisdictions in 2005.

Since then, implementation of reporting against these items has met many barriers. To date, most states and territories have not incorporated the CSNMDS data items into their collections, due largely to cost and feasibility issues.

The Australian Government Census of Child Care Services incorporated a significant proportion of the CSNMDS data items in its 2006 revision. However, this census is not an ongoing collection and the objective of establishing a collection that is comprehensive and national in coverage remains to be achieved.

The lack of consistent national data to support the policy development for such an important aspect of early childhood is undoubtedly a matter of serious concern to policy makers, program managers and the community. Early childhood issues are now high on the agenda of the Council of Australian Governments, and this presents an ideal environment to further the implementation of the CSNMDS.

I am sure this report on the feasibility of implementation, which was funded by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC), will serve as an important reference document as the Australian Government and state and territory governments work towards resolving this important issue.

Penny Allbon

Director

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

# Executive summary

In July 2007, the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) commissioned the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to examine the feasibility of implementing the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS).

The CSNMDS is a nationally agreed set of administrative data items which aim to provide answers to some of the key policy questions in relation to child care and preschool services in Australia. The CSNMDS has three components – *Service*, *Worker/caregiver*, and *Child*. A number of data items are included under each component and there are a total of 46 data items in the data set.

This feasibility study involved consultations with the Australian Government and state and territory government departments responsible for child care and preschools. Also included is a data mapping exercise to assess the extent to which existing data collected by these agencies have incorporated the data items, data concepts and definitions of the CSNMDS.

## Consultations with the states and territories

The AIHW engaged Dr Robyn Sheen from Shina Consulting to undertake face-to-face consultations with the states and territories. These meetings took place between December 2007 and March 2008. The consultant found that although the CSNMDS has been signed off by CDSMAC in 2005–06, most states and territories have not systematically incorporated the data items of the CSNMDS into their own collections. Most jurisdictions also expressed the view that it is not feasible at this time to integrate the CSNMDS into their departmental collections. Four key reasons emerged from these discussions:

- a lack of coordination between the community services and the education sectors on policy and data issues
- a lack of resources (human and financial)
- inability of the states and territories to collect *child* data from care providers because of legal constraints
- a lack of national agreement on an approach to early childhood learning (policy and data).

The issue of provider load was also mentioned by a number of jurisdictions. However, all jurisdictions were in favour of the CSNMDS being retained. There was general agreement that if a national approach to early childhood learning was agreed, the CSNMDS would be a useful start in setting up nationally consistent data collection. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) was being looked to for an overall policy direction.

## Data mapping exercise

The AIHW undertook the mapping exercise noted above and also examined the children's services data collection for the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS). The exercise found that:

- States and territories use different ways to collect data from their children’s services sector. Some jurisdictions rely solely on administrative by-product data collections, whereas others conduct annual service-based surveys or censuses.
- There are significant differences across jurisdictions in the data coverage of the children’s sector as a whole and also between the child care and preschool subsectors.
- The degree of alignment to the CSNMDS varies substantially across the different state and territory collections. Although a number of CSNMDS data items have been incorporated into state and territory collections, this has not been done on a systematic basis.
- Within collections, the degree of alignment to the CSNMDS also varies between the three components of the CSNMDS.
- There is minimal alignment between the National Preschool Census in its current form and the CSNMDS.
- If implemented across the Australian Government and state and territory government collections, the CSNMDS could be a useful source of consistent national data for some of the indicators currently reported in the children’s services chapter of the *Report on Government Services*.

## **Consultation with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

The AIHW undertook the consultation with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), which is the department responsible for child care and preschool at the Australian Government level. The consultation, which took place between May and September 2008, found that:

- A significant proportion of the CSNMDS data items and definitions were incorporated into the 2006 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS).
- The AGCCCS will no longer be continued in its current form as a result of the implementation of the new Child Care Management System (CCMS).
- Where applicable, CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated into the development of the CCMS. However, much of the data collected by the CCMS are being collected within the administration of *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and are therefore not available for external use.
- The CCMS has a narrower scope than the AGCCCS. Some of the AGCCCS data items, such as those relating to Worker/caregiver, are not currently collected in the CCMS.
- In order to satisfy the reporting requirement for the ROGS, a one-off small supplementary data collection was conducted in 2008. CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated in the supplementary data collection where appropriate.
- The CCMS has good data-collection capability. It may be possible in future years to expand the scope of the CCMS (for example, to collect Worker/caregiver information). However, longer term direction of CCMS had not been decided at the time of the consultation.

## Conclusion and the way forward

The Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS) is a set of tested, nationally agreed data items and standards that can form the 'core' of any new data collections for child care and preschools. If it is not feasible in the current environment to implement the CSNMDS as a separate collection, a staged or progressive incorporation of the CSNMDS data items into existing collections would still make significant improvements to national information over time, providing there is an agreed plan and mechanism to collate and report the data nationally.

If national data from the CCMS cannot be made available, it will take a significant amount of resources to expand and align the state and territory collections to a broadly common level, to enable the reporting of even part of the CSNMDS data items for the child care subsector.

A national agreement on the required data items, data collection responsibilities, the implementation of the CSNMDS data standards across existing collections, and national reporting by collating data from the CCMS and the other sources is a more effective and economic option.

For the way forward:

- Ensure that CSNMDS data items that were signed off in 2005 meet the data needs of the current COAG policy.
- Make a decision on whether to implement CSNMDS, either as a whole or in part. States and territories have signalled that they are looking to COAG for this overall policy direction.
- If the decision on implementation is yes, develop a national CSNMDS implementation plan for child care and preschools that details data requirements, data collection, collation and national reporting arrangements and responsibilities. This implementation plan needs to be agreed to by the Australian Government and the state and territory governments.

Early childhood issues are high on the priority of the COAG agenda at present and the environment presents an ideal opportunity to discuss and implement national reporting on the CSNMDS.

# Key findings

## Face-to-face consultation with the state and territories

Child care in Australia is funded by the Australian Government (through the provision of Child Care Benefits payment and Child Care Tax Rebate to eligible families who use approved child care services). Jurisdictions rely on the information collected by the Australian Government (to date through the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services, AGCCCS) to have access to child-based data at a jurisdictional level. Continued ongoing access to this information (regardless of the collection tool) was a priority for all jurisdictions.

Preschools operate under the authority of state and territory departments of education. For reporting on schools generally (i.e. Year 1 minus 1 to Year 12), national comparability issues are dealt with by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) which has a Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce. Reporting on government school education in the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS) relies on the provision of data that have been signed off by MCEETYA. However, to date, the preschool data for the ROGS are provided by the individual jurisdictions without MCEETYA involvement. Other data sources for the children's services chapter in the ROGS are the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the (former) Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

For all jurisdictions except South Australia, it is not possible to identify where children are accessing services across the child care and preschool subsectors, particularly where preschool services are being delivered by private providers.

Both the child care and preschool subsectors within all jurisdictions were supportive of a common framework; however, there was doubt whether achieving a common approach within a jurisdiction would translate to a common national approach. This was due to the significant differences between jurisdictions in their delivery of preschool services and regulation of child care. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) was being looked to for an overall policy direction.

Most jurisdictions thought that integration of the preschool and child care data systems would be feasible in principle, and there was general agreement that if a national approach to early childhood learning was agreed on, the CSNMDS would be a useful start in setting up a nationally consistent data collection. All jurisdictions were in favour of the CSNMDS being retained and some felt that partial and/or gradual implementation may be feasible. This view was supported by both children's services and the education sectors. However, it was also felt that the cost of implementation would be prohibitive without Australian Government assistance.

## Data mapping

The CSNMDS has three components: *Service*, *Worker/caregiver*, and *Child*. A number of data items are included in the data set under each component. The aim of the data mapping exercise is to ascertain the extent to which the data items, data concepts and definitions in the CSNMDS have been incorporated into existing collections.

The AIHW compared the following with the CSNMDS:

- licensing and registration forms for children's services from each jurisdiction
- government preschool enrolment forms
- forms used by the jurisdictions for their children's services statistical collections
- the 2007–08 *Non-financial data collection manual* for the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS)
- the 2007 National Preschool Census questionnaire.

The data mapping found that states and territories across Australia use different avenues to collect information relating to their children's services sector. The type of data sources that are largely common across most jurisdictions are:

- licensing and/or registration records of children's services
- student information collected on enrolment at public preschools
- an annual count of preschool enrolment numbers.

**Licensing and/or registration records** are a useful data source for the *Service* component of the CSNMDS, especially for reducing provider load when used in conjunction with survey or census information.

**Enrolment information** may be a useful data source for *Child* items in the CSNMDS for preschool children because about half of the data items in the *Child* component of the CSNMDS are collected on school enrolments forms. However, anecdotally, a number of jurisdictions have expressed reservations about the quality of the information collected on their public school enrolment forms. As well, the education departments do not have access to private preschool or child care enrolment forms and the majority of preschool services in Australia are delivered by private (i.e. non-government) providers.

All jurisdictions collect school **enrolment numbers** (disaggregated by age, sex, school-year and Indigenous status) at least once a year to meet the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs reporting requirement. A number of jurisdictions have either extended their school enrolment collection or are conducting something similar in parallel to cover public preschools. However, the data collected via this avenue are of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS because typically only a small number of items are being collected and the data are collected at the aggregate level.

Preschool enrolment numbers are also collected for the annual **National Preschool Census** (formerly the Indigenous Preschool Census) commissioned by DEEWR. This census covers government and non-government preschools across Australia.

The jurisdictions differ substantially in what (if any) additional statistical collections they undertake of their children's services.

**Queensland** and **South Australia** both conduct comprehensive annual censuses of all child care and preschool services in their jurisdictions. **Western Australia** and the **Australian**

**Capital Territory** do not conduct any statistical collection on their children's services. The remaining four jurisdictions lie somewhere in between. **New South Wales** conducts two annual censuses of its state-funded children's services – the NSW Department of Community Services conducts a census of the children's services administered by the department, and NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) conducts a census of the 100 DET-funded preschools across the state. **Victoria** conducts an annual census of the state government-funded kindergarten (i.e. preschool) programs, but there is no data collection on child care services. **Tasmania** runs a small statistical collection for its state-funded child care services but there is no equivalent data collection for preschools. The **Northern Territory** conducts an annual survey to collect information on capacity, vacancies, fees and opening hours from child care services. All licensed child care services in the Territory are covered in the survey but there is no data collection on preschools.

## Degree of alignment to the CSNMDS

The degree of alignment to the CSNMDS varies substantially across the state and territory statistical collections. Within collections, the degree of alignment also differs between the three components of the CSNMDS. For example, **Queensland's** children's services census maps very well to the *Service* and *Worker/caregiver* components of the CSNMDS but not to the *Child* component, reflecting the jurisdiction's lack of legislative authority to collect unit record child-based information from private service providers. The **South Australian** children's services census also has good alignment to the CSNMDS in terms of the breadth of the data items. However, there are significant differences in question wording and concepts. When used together with licensing information, the **Victorian** kindergarten collection largely meets the CSNMDS's information requirement with respect to preschools on the *Service* and *Worker/caregiver* components but not the *Child* component. The collections in **New South Wales, Tasmania** and the **Northern Territory**, in their current forms, do not align well to the CSNMDS. As noted above, the **Australian Capital Territory** and **Western Australia** do not conduct any statistical collection on their children's services.

## Non-financial data in the Report on Government Services

The *Report on Government Services* (ROGS) presents children's services information using a performance indicator framework. Performance is measured in terms of outputs and outcomes. Outputs are measured in terms of equity, effectiveness and efficiency. Data for the ROGS are drawn largely from the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services and the Australian Bureau of Statistics child care survey, supplemented by data from the states and territories. There is a good degree of alignment between the CSNMDS and the current children's services indicators in the ROGS. If the CSNMDS was to be implemented across the Australian Government and state and territory collections, it could be used to provide consistent national data for:

- part of the information currently required on the *special needs groups* for the Equity indicators
- most of the information currently required on the *service availability* component of the Effectiveness indicators

- about two-thirds of the information currently required on the *staff quality* component of the Effectiveness indicators.

The CSNMDS, in its present form, is not designed to provide data for the Efficiency or Outcome indicators. Note, however, that the children's services chapter in the ROGS will be reviewed in 2009 for the 2010 report. The degree of alignment between the CSNMDS and the indicators in the ROGS may change if the indicators in the ROGS were to change after the review.

## **Consultation with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

The AIHW undertook the consultation with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), which is the Australian Government department responsible for child care and preschool. The consultation, which took place between May and September 2008, found that a significant proportion of the CSNMDS data items and definitions were incorporated into the 2006 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS). However, the AGCCCS will no longer be continued in its current form as a result of the implementation of the new Child Care Management System (CCMS). Where applicable, CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated in the development of the CCMS. The CCMS is a transaction management system and has a narrower scope than the AGCCCS. Some of the AGCCCS data items, such as those in relation to Worker/caregivers, are not currently collected in the CCMS. In order to satisfy the reporting requirement for the ROGS, DEEWR conducted a one-off small supplementary data collection in 2008. CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated into the supplementary data collection where applicable.

Much of the data collected by the CCMS are being collected within the administration of *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and are therefore not available for external use. The CCMS has good data collection capability. It may be possible in future years to expand the scope of the CCMS, but longer term direction of CCMS has not been decided.

## **The way forward**

The Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS) is a set of tested, nationally agreed data items and standards that can form the 'core' of any new data collections for child care and preschools. If it is not feasible in the current environment to implement the CSNMDS as a separate collection, a staged or progressive incorporation of the CSNMDS data items into existing collections would still make significant improvements to national information over time, providing there is an agreed plan and mechanism to collate and report the data nationally.

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Early childhood issues are high on the priority of the COAG agenda at present and the environment presents an ideal opportunity to discuss and implement national reporting on the CSNMDS.

# 1 Introduction

## Background

Children's services encompass formal child care and preschool services. Child care services refer to the arrangements made for the care of children aged 0 to 12 years other than care by resident parents. The main models of delivery for child care in Australia are centre-based long day care, family day care, outside school hours care (i.e. before/after school hours and 'pupil free days' care), vacation care, occasional care and other care services.

In the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS), preschool services refer to structured educational programs provided by qualified teachers to children on a sessional basis, mainly in the year immediately *before* full-time schooling. These educational programs may be provided in dedicated preschools or in long day care or other settings. Although some states and territories offer special preschool programs to children aged 3 years, the majority of children attending preschools in Australia are 4 years old. As shown in Appendix 1, there is considerable variation between jurisdictions in their administrative arrangements and nomenclature for the preschool and pre-Year 1 years.

Until early 2008, the responsibility for children's services in Australia was spread across education and family and community services departments at both the National and the state and territory levels. Since then, the responsibility for child care at the National level has been transferred out of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is now responsible for both child care and preschools at the National level.

The Australian Government and the state and territory governments have different but complementary roles in supporting children's services. A description of their respective roles and responsibilities is contained in Appendix 2. Data collection for the children's service sector largely reflects the different roles played by the Australian Government and state and territory governments in this area.

## Development of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set

Although there are a number of children's services data collections already in place, these data collections are undertaken at different times, collect different information and use different data definitions. There is no one single data collection or even a combination of collections that could provide an accurate measure of the number or proportion of children who attend child care and/or preschools in Australia. Furthermore, there is no single body that has prime responsibility for all children's services in Australia which could take the lead in responding to the demands for nationally consistent and comparable data across the entire sector.

In 1998, the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) established the Children's Services Data Working Group in response to the identified need to improve data for children's services at the national level. This group was charged with the responsibility of developing a Children's Services National Minimum Data Set (CSNMDS). The CSNMDS is a nationally agreed set of administrative data items which aim to provide answers to some of the key policy questions in relation to child care and preschool services in Australia. Although the CSNMDS was developed under the auspices of the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC), from 2002 onwards, the then Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and representatives of the state and territory education departments also participated on the data working group as formal members.

Key policy questions that the CSNMDS could answer include:

- How many children in Australia are receiving child care and/or participating in preschool services activities?
- What are the demographic characteristics of these children?
- How many child care and preschool services are there in Australia?
- What are these services and what type of care do they provide?
- How are the available child care and preschool activities being used by children?
- To what extent do workers delivering child care and preschool activities have relevant qualifications and/or experience?

The final data items in the CSNMDS encompass three broad components:

- children who attend or usually attend child care and preschool services
- organisations (or services) that provide care to children
- workers who deliver child care and preschool activities to children.

**Table 1: Final data items in each component of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set as at June 2005**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Worker/caregiver</b>	<b>Child</b>
Service ID	Worker/caregiver ID	Letters of name
Service address	Type of work performed	Date of birth
Weeks of operation—per year	Paid /unpaid	Estimated date flag
Days of operation—per week	Total hours worked	Sex
Start time	Additional items for paid workers/caregivers:	Suburb/town/locality name—in-home care only
Finish time		Postcode—in-home care only
Service delivery mode	Specific role	Indigenous status
Service delivery setting	Working arrangements (permanent/ fixed-term contract/casual)	School status
Management type	Employment status	Main language other than English spoken at home
Legal entity	Age group (years)	Child with a disability—need for assistance
Service activity types provided	Sex	
Main service activity type	Indigenous status	Arrival time at service
Fee schedules		

*(continued)*

**Table 1 (continued): Final data items in each component of the Children’s Services National Minimum Data Set as at June 2005**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Worker/caregiver</b>	<b>Child</b>
Licensed places	Qualification field	Departure time from service
Places offered	Qualification level	Preschool service provided
	Educational enrolment status	Family type
	Length of experience	Parent(s)/guardian(s)—sex
	Length of time with current service	Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)

The development, testing and refinement of the CSNMDS have been occurring on a somewhat protracted basis for a decade. Development of the final data dictionary for the CSNMDS was completed in 2005; NCSIMG approved the CSNMDS in July 2005 and CDSMAC endorsed it in 2006. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) published the final report on the development of the CSNMDS in February 2007 (AIHW 2007). This report also includes a complete set of the data specifications for the items in the CSNMDS. The key stages in the development of the CSNMDS are set out in Appendix 3.

## **Implementation of the CSNMDS**

Although the data dictionary for the CSNMDS was signed off in 2005, implementation of the CSNMDS has not followed. The ‘big bang’ approach of implementation, which often works well with single program NMDs, did not seem feasible in this case because of the complexity of the children’s services sector. This complexity arises out of the differences within and between jurisdictions in portfolio (education and community services) responsibilities for child care and preschool, and the variations in delivery of services, program administration, data collections and systems.

Although a significant proportion of the data elements from the CSNMDS were incorporated into the May 2006 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS), the extent to which implementation of the data set has occurred across the state and territory collections was unclear. CDSMAC indicated a commitment to the implementation of the CSNMDS by allocating \$90,000 in 2006–07 to explore options and the associated costs and benefits for national implementation of this data set. A working group chaired by Western Australia was formed in November 2006 to design and oversee the project. The project went to tender in December 2006 but no suitable tenderer was found. It also became apparent at this time that the introduction of the Child Care Management System (CCMS) by the then Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) would have significant implications for the proposed CSNMDS implementation study. The future of the AGCCCS after 2006 was also unclear upon the introduction of the CCMS.

In order to ensure that the goodwill and momentum on work to date on the CSNMDS was not lost, the working group agreed to amend the feasibility study proposal and resubmit it to CDSMAC for 2007–08 via NCSIMG. CDSMAC endorsed the feasibility study to be led by the

AIHW, using the funding originally set aside for the 2006–07 cost-benefit study. The feasibility study occurred in two phases.

**Phase 1** involved working with the education and community services departments in the states and territories to identify potential implementation strategies for the CSNMDS (and barriers to implementation) on a jurisdiction-specific basis. This phase of the project started in July 2007 while the CCMS was still under development. The AIHW engaged Dr Robyn Sheen from Shina Consulting to consult with the states and territories and these meetings took place between December 2007 and March 2008.

A second component for Phase 1 was a data mapping exercise, comparing scope and the data items in the existing state and territory collections with those in the CSNMDS. This data mapping exercise was undertaken by the AIHW using the data collection forms provided by the jurisdictions.

**Phase 2** involved consultation with DEEWR (before the machinery of government changes this was to be FaCSIA and DEST) to assess the extent to which the CCMS and the other collections such as the National Preschool Census would generate data which are consistent with data elements specified in the CSNMDS. This phase of the project took place between May and September 2008.

## **Report structure**

Dr Sheen's report on the Phase 1 consultations is included in Chapter 2 of this report. Results from the data mapping exercise and the Phase 2 consultation with DEEWR are in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The report concludes in Chapter 5 with AIHW's suggested way forward.

## **2 Report on state and territory consultation prepared by Shina Consulting**

### **The project's objectives**

The consultant's meetings with senior officers in all states and territories had the following objectives:

1. to obtain data manuals and/or other documentation concerning their existing data collections
2. to ascertain the extent to which integration of the CSNMDS is feasible within their departmental collections and reporting requirements
3. to document whether the systems between departments and collections within each state are integrated, or in the process of being integrated, and whether the CSNMDS has been incorporated
4. to document whether their information systems match current and projected policy planning and program delivery; and identify shortfalls (if any), and what would be needed to meet any shortfalls
5. to document any inefficiencies and duplications within their respective system(s)
  - at state/territory level
  - at service provider level, including respondent burden
6. to document any other barriers to implementation within their jurisdiction.

### **Overview of the consultation meetings**

Notwithstanding that the CSNMDS was signed off by the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC), and that CDSMAC also agreed that this implementation project should proceed, many of the departmental officers spoken to during the consultation needed to be made aware of the background and the purpose of the CSNMDS. Many had never seen or heard of the AIHW's Final report on the development of the CSNMDS (2007). The various responses from each jurisdiction are presented later in this report.

Although all jurisdictions agreed that integration of the child care and preschool<sup>1</sup> data collection systems would be desirable, for some, the obstacles seemed insurmountable – at least in the short term. A small number of jurisdictions were in the process of exploring integration, and South Australia and Victoria have agreed to participate in a project to test implementation of the CSNMDS in their systems.

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<sup>1</sup> This section of the report uses 'preschool' as a shorthand term; the nomenclature varied from state to state and therefore 'preschool' refers to kindergarten and prep in certain jurisdictions.

The following sections summarise the meetings with all jurisdictions in respect of the project's objectives.

## **Provision of data manuals and documentation about data collections**

At the time of the consultation with the (then) Department of Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Child Care Management System (CCMS) was still being developed, with roll out due in January 2008. The abolition of the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS) had been foreshadowed at this time. This was an issue which was raised by every state and territory during the consultation as one that would basically dispense with all existing child-based data. As most child care is funded by the Australian Government, this would leave most jurisdictions without the wherewithal to have access to child-based data at a state level.

All jurisdictions collect some data on registered and/or licensed child care centres. These data relate to the regulation of the centres—for example, the number of children attending, qualifications of staff, hours of operation, type of services (but there are no detailed data about the children). For some jurisdictions, data are also gathered through annual surveys, and all jurisdictions agreed to provide survey instruments and information about their data collections to the AIHW. However, for the most part, jurisdictions do not have data manuals, counting rules, data dictionaries or documentation for their collections.

For preschool services, most jurisdictions cited the reporting in the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS) as being relevant to this project. The exception was New South Wales, which noted that its delivery of child care services was different from other jurisdictions and would send details of its collection to the AIHW.

Apart from South Australia where the services and systems are integrated, there are no collections which reflect an 'early childhood' perspective. Thus, it is not possible to identify where children are accessing services across sectors, particularly where preschool services are being delivered by private providers.

There was support from all jurisdictions for the AIHW to undertake a national mapping of these collections.

## **Feasibility of integration of CSNMDS**

On a national level it would appear that reporting on child care is clearly the domain of the Australian Government. Most jurisdictions cited the ROGS as the main national reporting publication. Data for the ROGS are drawn largely from the Australian AGCCCS and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) child care surveys supplemented by data from the states and territories.

The purpose of the CCMS is to standardise and simplify Child Care Benefit administration, including the capability to lodge data electronically. It is understood that both the AGCCCS and the CCMS use the data elements in the CSNMDS, but only to the extent that they are relevant to each collection. The CCMS does not collect child-based and workforce data and is not aimed at replicating the information gathered through the AGCCCS.

For reporting on schools generally, national comparability issues are dealt with by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) which has a Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce. Reporting on government school education in the ROGS relies on the provision of data that have been signed off by MCEETYA. However, to date, the preschool data for the ROGS are provided by the individual jurisdictions without MCEETYA involvement. Other data sources are the ABS and the (former) DEST, now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

There were mixed responses on whether integration of the CSNMDS is feasible within departmental child care and preschool collections, with most jurisdictions stating that it was not feasible at this time. The main reasons cited were:

- lack of coordination between sectors on policy and data issues
- limited human and financial resources
- privacy issues associated with unique identifiers and linked data
- impracticality because of limitations on states and territories to obtain child data from private providers
- lack of national agreement on an approach to early childhood learning.

Even so, both sectors within jurisdictions were supportive of the idea of a common framework. There was considerable doubt, however, whether achieving a common approach within a jurisdiction would translate to a common national approach, given the significant differences between jurisdictions in their delivery of preschool services and regulation of child care. Although the CSNMDS was seen as a useful tool for achieving uniformity, these barriers tended to prevail.

South Australia and Victoria agreed to participate in an implementation project. Both these jurisdictions already have an integrated approach towards delivery of services.

## **Integration of departmental data systems**

South Australia has integrated preschool and child care information systems and Victoria has a single system with discrete collections that have some capacity to interact. Otherwise, all other jurisdictions advised that their preschool and child care systems are different and not compatible in terms of data matching. Most jurisdictions thought integration of the systems would be feasible, but it was felt that the cost would be prohibitive without Australian Government assistance.

## **Policy planning and program delivery needs**

There were two aspects to this question. The first was the extent to which current information systems matched the needs of individual governments. For the most part, states and territories felt that their information needs in respect of child care services could be improved. At present, they rely totally on the national census for child-based data, while being limited to obtaining information from registered or licensed providers on regulated activities. The information needed for strategic planning for current needs and into the future are not necessarily available from the existing data collections (which in some jurisdictions

are very sparse). Preschool services, on the other hand, were less of a problem, although there was an issue in some jurisdictions about service provision by non-government providers.

The second aspect related to the shift towards early childhood learning at the national level and the COAG deliberations. With the policy position across Australia still evolving, there was a general view that it would be prudent to wait and see what the COAG outcomes were before making any resource-intensive decisions about implementation of the CSNMDS. There was general agreement, however, that in the event that a national approach to early childhood learning was agreed, the CSNMDS would be a useful start in setting up nationally consistent data collections. It was also noted that, given the time that had elapsed since the CSNMDS project began in 1998 and the shifts in policy focus in recent years, the CSNMDS in its current form may not meet all the information needs likely to arise out of the COAG process.

## **Inefficiencies and duplication within systems**

With the exception of South Australia, there seems to be little or no capacity for jurisdictions to identify where children are accessing more than one child care service, or accessing both child care and preschool. Information from registered providers of child care generally relates to the number of child care places within a given centre and not the number of children attending. It is not unusual for more than one child to be filling a single place on a part-time basis. Furthermore, there is a dearth of information available from non-registered child care centres. In some jurisdictions, private providers deliver programs that are called preschool services, although they may not necessarily conform to the preschool standards set for government-funded providers.

There is no consistent approach to child care qualifications across Australia, but it appears that all jurisdictions have similar regulation about tertiary-qualified preschool teachers.

## **Other barriers to CSNMDS implementation**

There seemed to be a general feeling among both education and community services sectors that an overriding barrier to implementation was the lack of a cohesive policy at the national level. There seemed to be no expectation that the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference (CDSMC) or MCEETYA would provide joint leadership, which meant that COAG was being looked to for overall policy direction.

For those states where the services were not integrated, this was also a major factor given that policy development and delivery occurred within portfolio silos. Coordination and cooperation between the sectors at the political and bureaucratic level was minimal. Although at officer level discussions were taking place in some jurisdictions, there was generally not the level of commitment to implementation of the CSNMDS across both sectors that would be needed to make it happen in the foreseeable future.

At the senior level, there was limited awareness of the CSNMDS and its objectives. In some jurisdictions it was clear that the integration of data collections and information systems had never been broached before. The issues consistently raised by the states and territories in the

consultations about preschool were the different approaches between the jurisdictions – different nomenclature, starting ages, institutional arrangements, and so on.

Another aspect of the 'silo barrier' was the lack of any funding relationship between children's services and education and, as already mentioned, privacy considerations with respect to linked data (in the event that agreement was reached to have a cohesive approach). The ever-present issue of how to implement the system within the non-government-funded sector was also a critical barrier. In some jurisdictions, the lack of technical expertise was an issue that extended beyond the resource funding issue. In one jurisdiction, it was the case that even if there was agreement at all the necessary levels (political and bureaucratic), the human resources were not available for implementation.

## **Conclusion**

It was manifestly the case that implementation of the CSNMDS was not in itself a reason to undertake the major task of integration and implementation. As long as mandatory information needs are being met, the costs associated with integration of information systems outweigh the perceived benefits. There was also recognition that the Australian Government's policies on 15 hours per week universal access to preschool and COAG's early childhood learning working groups may provide some impetus to move in that direction. That said, there was also the expectation that such an initiative on a nationwide basis would need to be accompanied by substantial Australian Government funding.

There appeared to be a widespread reluctance to invest scarce resources in an area which is currently being reviewed by COAG. The tendency in many jurisdictions was to wait and see whether the outcomes from the COAG process match up with the CSNMDS, and whether Australian Government funding would be provided to assist with implementation.

Finally, notwithstanding the many barriers that seem to suggest that full implementation of the CSNMDS is unlikely in the foreseeable future, all jurisdictions were in favour of its being retained. Many felt that partial and graduated implementation may be a feasible approach. This view was generally supported by both children's services and the education sectors. There was also strong support for the AIHW's data mapping exercise, and broad agreement that the outcomes from the mapping would be an essential element in future deliberations on the CSNMDS implementation.

Summaries of the meetings between the consultant and each of the states and territories are provided on the following pages.

## **Consultations**

As a means of ascertaining the implementation status nationally, meetings were arranged in each jurisdiction between the consultant and senior officers from the relevant education and community services departments. Where possible, the meetings were arranged so that both subsectors met with the consultant at the same time. In some jurisdictions, this was the first time that implementation of the CSNMDS had been discussed between departments.

## CSNMDS implementation project

The first meetings were held in South Australia and Victoria. They were chosen to lead off the consultation because they were further along the sector and system integration process than other jurisdictions, and they had leadership roles in national forums. Both states were asked if they would be willing to participate in an implementation project in cooperation with the AIHW to ascertain the extent to which partial (if not full) implementation was still a feasible prospect.<sup>2</sup>

In South Australia, the consultant met with Mr Chris Robinson who is Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) and Chair of the Early Childhood Reference Group, a subcommittee of the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee. In South Australia, children's services and preschool are both administered by DECS. While being strongly supportive of the CSNMDS, Mr Robinson noted that there are barriers to national implementation. In the absence of a consistent policy approach across Australia to early childhood development, including mandatory qualifications and learning outcomes, he noted that with a change of government at the national level, it was likely that there would be rapid change in the policy direction on early childhood development. Although this would be a huge task, he considered that this (CSNMDS) project was timely and would encourage the states and territories to rethink core principles.

Mr Robinson agreed to South Australia being one of the two states that would participate in an implementation project and nominated an officer to work with the AIHW. He was also supportive of the data mapping project as a preliminary step in driving partial to full implementation of the CSNMDS at the national level. Subsequently, Mr Robinson has assumed the role of Chair of the COAG Early Childhood Development data sub-group which is developing national performance indicators.

In Victoria, the consultant met with Mr Michael White, Acting Director of the Office for Children and Early Childhood Development and Chair of the Children's Services subcommittee of CDSMAC. Mr White was also supportive of the CSNMDS project, but felt that there was a major problem with national implementation because of embedded intransigence and outmoded models of delivery. Mr White noted that Victoria was well ahead of many other jurisdictions in moving towards an integrated systems approach, but even so, there are still some hurdles to be overcome.

Victoria's data systems have some capacity to interface, and Victoria has released early childhood data on 154 child outcome indicators with data sourced from all Victorian Government databases. However, without a consistent minimum data set for child care and preschool, the capacity to report has limitations. Victoria is currently working with the ABS on a project which aims to link data on child material across agencies using a unique identifier. Mr White agreed to Victoria being the second jurisdiction to participate in an implementation project.

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<sup>2</sup> Earlier field tests and two pilot tests had resulted in final CSNMDS specifications which were signed off by the National Children's Services Information Management Group, and subsequent commitment from CDSMAC to development of an implementation plan and, ultimately, inclusion of the data specifications in state and territory data collections.

## New South Wales

New South Wales has the biggest delivery of child care services in the country and is quite different from other jurisdictions. It has the largest delivery by non-government services both funded and part-funded. There is no differentiation between child care and preschool.

The NSW regulatory framework recognises the integrated nature of early childhood education and care. All licensed early childhood services, including childcare and preschools, are required by regulation to provide a tailored education program and employ appropriately qualified staff. Private providers of child care do not provide state-funded preschool. There is no difference between child care and community-based preschool.

Because New South Wales does not distinguish between child care and preschool, there are difficulties with making comparisons with other jurisdictions which have discrete systems and data collections. All services are licensed, which provides some information on the service providers, but the data are not child-focused.

The Department of Community Services (DoCS) has collected some survey-based child-focused data from the funded sector over 2007. As a consequence, New South Wales is starting to pick up more information. The CSNMDS represents a very small subset of this collection.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) undertakes a 1-week snapshot which collects data about staff and children attending preschool. DET is open to making some changes in its collection; for example, traditionally it has not asked for information about parents' income. The snapshot collects information about whether children access other services, and New South Wales is moving towards unique student identifiers.

Under reforms currently being phased in, DoCS will regulate DET preschool services in non-government schools. New South Wales is looking at what its forward reporting requirements will be and what sort of information systems will be required. From the state's perspective, in order for the CSNMDS to be implemented on an integrated basis, the following aspects are considered requisite:

- a regulatory platform that is consistent across sectors
- consistent nomenclature
- cross-government support as a framework and concept.

It was noted that, in reality, the service system is very fragmented. Children's services are hampered by a lack of good comparable data. DoCS and DET believe there is some capacity to get much closer to the CSNMDS – they are overhauling the children's services licensing and funding database.

## Victoria

Preschool is called kindergarten in Victoria. Child care and kindergarten are both required to be licensed under the *Children's Services Act 1996*. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development administers the Act. Kindergarten programs which meet the criteria for funding are eligible for state government per capita funding and kindergarten can be provided in a range of settings including integrated sessions in long day care centres, occasional care services, community kindergartens, children's hubs and on school sites. All services delivering kindergarten programs are licensed and the majority meet the criteria and are funded to deliver kindergarten programs to children in the year before entry to school, and targeted programs for 3-year-old children within the child protection system and to Indigenous children.

Victoria needs a consistent minimum data set covering both child care and preschool. Funded services report to government annually through a paper-based survey. This survey collects data on numbers of children enrolled (including children of non-English-speaking background, children with a disability or additional needs, children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, children receiving fee subsidies), attendance data for a set week, fees, user satisfaction, quality assurance, and numbers of staff including qualified staff. The design of the questions in the annual data collection was based on the CSNMDS.

There is an online data system (CHISOL) which was designed to license, monitor and fund services in Victoria and which collects integrated child care and education data relevant to these activities. The system starts from a licensing and funding perspective, although a new element has been introduced – it is now collecting data on the kindergarten workforce.

CHISOL is limited in its capacity to record elements and data requirements pertaining to children, and without the unique identifier it does not have the capacity to identify duplication in access to more than one service (kindergarten and childcare). The system now records information on 3-year-old Aboriginal children.

The system does not provide the data needed by Victoria for forward planning, particularly in the area of long day care and integrated children's services. There is no current system which would help to extend the knowledge base in areas such as current vacancies and gaps in unmet need. From Victoria's perspective, a major barrier to implementation of the CSNMDS is provider load – it would entail a great deal more work for the service providers who are already required to complete a lengthy paper-based survey to fulfil data requirements.

Victoria agreed to provide the spreadsheets for both its children's services and kindergarten collections for the data mapping exercise that the AIHW is undertaking. Victoria does not have a published data manual or data dictionary but uses the CSNMDS to frame questions, so it will be necessary for the AIHW to map consistency from the detail in the spreadsheet.

Victoria agreed to participate in a CSNMDS implementation project following this feasibility study. The state is currently working with the ABS on a project to link data, and child-based data will have a unique identifier. Victoria is investigating bringing together data systems within the newly established Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

## Queensland

*Note: At the time when this project was undertaken, the Queensland Department of Communities (DoC) was responsible for licensing and monitoring the provision of child care. A new Office for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has since been established to take the lead responsibility for children's early development, bringing together responsibility for early education and child care services in one agency. ECEC is aligned with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) and reports to the Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts. The information below reflects the situation before the establishment of the ECEC.*

DOC undertakes an annual census of licensed and state government-funded child care services. There is no legislative requirement for providers to complete the survey and where there is no funding relationship, information is provided on goodwill. If the national child care census is abandoned, there is currently no possibility of obtaining child-based data. DOC has attempted to align its survey as closely as possible with the CSNMDS. DETA also conducts an annual census of early education services delivered or funded by the department.

The DOC survey results cannot presently deal with double counting where a child is accessing more than one child care service or is also attending Preparatory Year (Prep). This issue arises because the current survey does not collect child-based information using a unique identifier statistical linkage key. The 2007 survey had a reasonable response rate, but not all sections of the survey were completed consistently and the response rates vary for some components of the data.

DOC maintains data on licensed child care services through the Child Care Information System. These data focus on licensing and monitoring requirements as set out in the *Child Care Act 2002* and the *Child Care Regulation 2003*. DETA and DOC have collaborated to share and collate data for inclusion in the annual *Report on government services*, but given the different purposes for collecting and reporting data, the data systems are not compatible. DETA maintains data on Prep and funded services that deliver programs for the 3½ to 4½ year cohort (i.e. community kindergartens and Bound for Success Pre-Preparatory programs). As the two departments do not have compatible information management systems, data cannot currently be seamlessly shared across information systems.

The biggest barrier to fully implementing the CSNMDS is the absence of a formal reporting relationship outside licensing requirements between most child care providers and DOC. This means that there is no scope for Queensland to insist on compulsory participation in data collection for non-state-funded services.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in collecting child care data in Queensland, it was felt that if the Australian Government made an undertaking to implement and manage the CSNMDS, there would be a greater incentive to put a data collection system in place for state-funded services. In long day care, for example, only 1% of services across Queensland are state government-funded. In respect of unit record data, there are significant costs involved in developing a tool and system to collect this data. Work is currently under way to streamline data collection processes.

The Australian Government currently collects a significant amount of information about individual children and families using services and has previously undertaken biennial child care censuses. Much of the data collected has been reported in the annual *Report on Government Services*, as it is generally comparable across jurisdictions. States and territories

are well placed to complement this data with data from state-funded services. This has the potential to reduce the burden for service providers, many of whom are providing similar data to the two levels of government.

A fundamental issue in Queensland and presumably in other jurisdictions is the impact of outcomes from Council of Australian Governments (COAG) processes in relation to Australian Government election commitments and policies. Queensland favours the implementation of the CSNMDS led by the Australian Government, while noting that the CSNMDS may need to be amended to meet the needs of COAG outcomes. Queensland, along with other jurisdictions, is waiting to see where and how the \$450 million 'on the table' for universal access will be allocated and is working collaboratively through COAG processes and undertaking significant research and preparation in readiness for this reform. In this transitional stage, the Department of Education, Training and the Arts continues to collect data and is exploring future data needs resulting from COAG negotiations.

Officers from Queensland can see many potential benefits of the CSNMDS. The state has considered additional methods of obtaining data to gain information included in the CSNMDS, such as undertaking a workforce survey (snapshot); however, this approach is not an option which is considered viable in receiving quality outcomes. Involvement with the *Report on government services* and the COAG process to date has demonstrated that there is a lack of timely, complete and nationally comparable data across jurisdictions, which will be essential to measuring and monitoring progress on meeting COAG outcomes.

## Western Australia

Preschool is known as kindergarten in Western Australia. Child care is mostly delivered by for-profit providers in metropolitan and urban areas, and not-for-profit providers in rural and remote areas. The current data collection system for children's services is in the process of being upgraded. A new database has been designed on the basis of functionality and written around the legislation. It does not use the CSNMDS. There are no data manuals or data dictionary. The data collection file management system was purchased from Tasmania and concentrates on centre licensing information, including characteristics about centres. There are no unit record data.

In addition, there are a number of community-based programs, particularly in Aboriginal communities, which are community- or local government-funded, and may operate only for limited periods. No data are available on these programs which may be an amalgam of child care and preschool.

The national census is a vital source of data on child care, although it doesn't provide regional data. In addition, Western Australia uses *Report on government services* and ABS data for policy development, and consequently there is a lack of critical regional data.

For kindergarten, the MCEETYA data manual is used in a twice a year census. As is the case for child care, there is a lack of vital regional data needed for policy development.

To date, there has been no attempt to integrate the children's services and education data systems, because they are not compatible, and integration is considered not feasible. Western Australia has neither the financial nor human resources available to establish an integrated system covering both sectors. Furthermore, the state has no jurisdiction to obtain data from private providers, including state-funded providers.

Western Australia does not have a child care strategy. The state is waiting to see what the outcomes are from the COAG early childhood process, and suggested that there may be an avenue for undertaking a survey with other jurisdictions on obtaining national consistency.

Western Australia supports maintaining the CSNMDS project. The state is unable to move further towards implementation at this stage, but would be interested in being a trial site if the Australian Government provided the necessary resources.

## South Australia

In South Australia, children's services and education, which includes preschool, are contained within the one department – the Department of Education and Children's Services. South Australia has been a leading state in its approach to early childhood learning.

The SA education curriculum framework includes preschool. There are oral reading tests and indicators – these could provide the basis for standards across the country. Results from the tests demonstrate that literacy improves for school starters when they have been to preschool.

South Australia is also in the process of establishing 24 Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting – these centres provide a range of services to families which can include child care, preschool, health and family support services. This is a whole-of-government initiative in the state.

South Australia would like to see a mix of Certificate 3, Diploma of Children's Services and Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) qualifications for child care workers with a consistent approach across Australia. A policy position across Australia has not evolved, but the current COAG process suggests that policy will undergo some rapid changes. It is therefore timely to undertake this review of the CSNMDS project. South Australia would be interested in being involved and is supportive of the AIHW's data mapping exercise.

The SA data system needs to be updated. For example, thought needs to be given to unit record data for each child. South Australia has undertaken a 'gap analyses' and found that not all of the CSNMDS data items have been systematically incorporated into its data collections. That is partly because the SA collections were running long before the sign-off on the CSNMDS, and the collections are still meeting local needs.

Subsequently, the Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Children's Services assumed the role of Chair of the COAG Early Childhood Development Data sub-group. It is understood that this group is providing a set of national performance indicators for early childhood. In discussions with the consultant on this matter, it was pointed out that the COAG sub-group has been charged with looking beyond existing frameworks. Clearly, given the fragmented nature of national implementation of the CSNMDS, it will be important that the data needed to guide a new framework are available and draw upon the substantial work already done at the national level on CSNMDS.

## Tasmania

Tasmania has a small data collection on child care services funded by the State Department of Education (DoE), which contains only aggregated data about children and staff. It meets the Australian Government's reporting requirements for Neighbourhood Model Occasional Care (established in a Memorandum of Understanding) and also meets minimum requirements for the *Report on government services*. The data collection does not contain the required data elements of the CSNMDS and it is used only for a very small proportion of child care services (i.e. not used for Australian Government-funded services). Tasmania has limited capacity in respect of children's services data.

Preschool is called kindergarten in Tasmania and is also funded through DoE, including services delivered in non-government schools. Where kindergarten services are delivered in child care organisations, they are required to be registered as a school with the Schools Registration Board and have qualified kindergarten teachers registered with the Teachers Registration Board. Government kindergarten services collect attendance figures, but these are not currently reported on.

There is an issue regarding crossover in schools reporting and CSNMDS, such as period of time of collection, and broad assumptions about the workforce and qualifications. The pilot testing of the CSNMDS, as part of the national trial, showed that there is no difficulty in collecting the CSNMDS data elements, although they would need to be collected from individual schools, and there would be some duplication. There are unit record data for government-funded kindergartens but not for non-government-funded ones.

DoE is in the process of changing its data system, but there is still no way of telling whether children are accessing both child care services and kindergarten. Although the systems between areas of the departments are not integrated or compatible, some of the CSNMDS data elements are the same in both collections. The schools data collection meets the MCEETYA requirements (see MCEETYA data manual for the ROGS).

DoE is interested in looking at ways it could present existing kindergarten data for government schools without needing to collect data twice (i.e. through the current data collection and again for the purpose of the CSNMDS). This will avoid duplication.

DoE have considered whether the CSNMDS could be implemented, but there has not been any coordination between education departments across jurisdictions, and there is currently little capacity to implement independently at the state level.

With respect to child care, if the Australian Government stops collecting the data previously collected through the child care census, there is no capacity for the state to fill the data shortfall as it can implement data requirements only on state-funded services.

Although a full implementation of the CSNMDS in relation to child care is not possible at present in Tasmania because of a lack of capacity, Tasmania is absolutely in favour of the retention of the CSNMDS as it represents what should be collected at a national level for children's services.

*Note:* There is a lot of interest in Tasmania in data matching and integration between health and education. Tasmania is developing an early childhood reporting framework (for ages 0-6 years) based on Victoria's 150 outcome indicators. The framework is very broad and includes many aspects of early child development. Although there is one indicator relating to

child care, the focus/scope of this framework is quite different from that covered by the CSNMDS and therefore work has not been done to compare the collections/reporting.

## Australian Capital Territory

Preschool is administered by the Department of Education and Training (DET). Teachers are required to have teaching qualifications, but need not have early childhood qualifications.

The licensing of child care is administered by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS). There is a very small database which collects information mainly from licensed centres and consists largely of activity measures. It was developed before 1998 and the CSNMDS has not been implemented.

School enrolment forms for the kindergarten year contain a separate green form which asks whether children are also attending a child care program. The Australian Capital Territory undertakes a school census which publishes aggregate data for government and non-government schools and, for 2008, will include data for the (government only) preschool year. So there is some capacity to identify where children are accessing both preschool and child care services.

Although there is no synergy between child care and preschool data collections at present, the two departments work closely together and have integrated their policy and planning. From a broad DHCS perspective, the policy imperatives are to focus on children at risk, and increase access for Indigenous children to child care.

DHCS uses the CHIPS data base system and DET uses MAIS. These are not compatible systems and cannot share information. Nevertheless, because the Australian Capital Territory is a small jurisdiction, integration of the two data collections and implementation of the CSNMDS would be feasible (once privacy issues have been overcome). Integration of the two systems, however, would involve a large cost to the government and an additional burden on child care centres. There were some doubts expressed about whether the problems associated with a unique identifier could be overcome (privacy and the level of coordination that would be needed across sectors).

Implementation of the CSNMDS across both sectors at this time would involve significant resources, and the Australian Capital Territory will reserve its decision until there is a decision arising from the COAG process, and there is national agreement.

## Northern Territory

Historically, there has been minimal interaction between the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) which administers preschool, and the Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) which regulates child care.

The Northern Territory Government subsidises child care for 3–5 year olds, but this is not called preschool. Child care does not require the higher qualifications, which mean that staffing costs are lower. Preschool is not a defined concept in the NT child care system – there may be the same activities provided in childcare services, but they operate under different rules.

There are a large number of children accessing child care services at the moment which are not picked up in data collections because the services are delivered on non-licensed premises. New legislation is being introduced which will broaden the scope of coverage. Originally, the legislation was intended to include government and non-government preschools, but will now include only non-government, and will pick-up all of the remote (non-government) services.<sup>3</sup> There is no data manual or data dictionary for child care services. The Northern Territory undertakes a child care survey which collects information on capacity, vacancies, fees and opening hours. Information about children relies on the AGCCCS.

DEET collects data on the number of preschool enrolments by age and sex for both government and non-government schools during an annual census of all schools in August each year and weekly enrolment and attendance information eight times a year. These collections provide aggregate data on the number of students, age, sex and Indigenous status, but do not collect data at individual student level. DEET has a unique identifier for each student in government schools and this is used to record daily enrolment and attendance data at the individual student level. Although most students are properly identified, there are some duplicate records where the student has attended multiple schools and there are issues with the completeness of some records.

DEET has examined the CSNMDS and found consistency with some data elements but not others. The department believes that privacy provisions prevent the reporting of some of the linked data which, although collected on enrolment forms, require individual permissions to on-provide to another organisation or to use for analyses (for example, those requiring access to clinical systems regarding health status).

Although the Northern Territory has a data warehousing system, the individual data collection systems are not integrated and cannot be joined up. The existing systems do not meet the Northern Territory's current policy planning needs, especially in respect of the continuum from child care to preschool.

A key issue for the Northern Territory in considering wider implementation of the CSNMDS is the extra burden it places on providers. Some of the information required is complex, and the issues are whether the purpose of collecting the information can be explained, how the information will be used, and whether it will be useful in the local context.

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<sup>3</sup> Most remote child care services are non-government, whereas preschool services are government.

### **3 The data mapping exercise**

The primary aim of the data mapping exercise was to ascertain the extent to which states and territories have incorporated the data items, data concepts and definitions in the CSNMDS into their existing collections. The AIHW requested collection forms, data manuals, counting rules, definitions and any other documentation concerning their existing statistical collections from the states and territories. Two jurisdictions (Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) indicated that they do not conduct statistical collection specifically for their child care sector but do collect preschool enrolment numbers for the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS). They also collect administrative data via licensing or registration of child care services and enrolment at preschool. In the course of the consultation, a number of jurisdictions suggested that the AIHW also examine the data collection manual used for the children's services chapter of the ROGS. As such, the AIHW extended the data mapping exercise to include child care licensing/registration and public preschool enrolment forms for all jurisdictions and the ROGS non-financial data collection manual.

Also examined in this data mapping exercise was the mail-out questionnaire for the 2007 National Preschool Census.

#### **Data sources**

States and territories across Australia use different avenues to collect information in relation to their children's services sector.

**Table 2: Key state and territory data sources for children’s services information (as at 2008)**

Jurisdiction	Children’s services licensing and/or registration information	Public preschool enrolment records	Public preschool enrolment count undertaken at least annually*	Statistical collection on state-funded children’s services	Statistical collection on child care services only (irrespective of funding source)	Annual census of child care and preschools in the jurisdiction
NSW	√	√	√	√		
Vic	√			√ (kindergarten only)		
Qld	√					√
WA	√	√	√ (and private)			
SA	√	√				√
Tas	√	√	√	√ (child care only)		
ACT	√	√	√			
NT	√	√	√		√	

\* This refers to the collection of preschool enrolment numbers that complements the collection of school enrolment numbers for MCEETYA/ROGS reporting requirements.

## Data sources that are largely common across jurisdictions

### Licensing and registration data for children’s services

As shown in Table 2, all jurisdictions have licensing and/or registration information for their children’s services. However, the legislation governing the administration of children’s services is different in each jurisdiction. The type of service that requires licensing or registration, as well as the type and amount of information collected via the licensing and/or registration processes, therefore also vary across jurisdictions.

A number of data items in the *Service* component of the CSNMDS are often collected in licensing and/or registration of the children’s services, for example, *Service address*, *Legal entity*, *Service activity type*, *Main service activity type*, *Weeks of operation*, and *Hours of operation*. Unit record information on *Worker/Caregiver* is often required as part of the licensing application and/or renewal, but typically the only data items in the *Worker/caregiver* component of the CSNMDS that might be collected through licensing are *Qualification field* and *Qualification level*. *Child* information is not collected on licensing or registration forms, except with respect to the age range and/or the maximum number of children in care for which the licence is sought.

Licensing and registration information in isolation is therefore of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS. However, it is a useful data source which complements statistical collections

and for reducing provider load. Providing the licensing data are not out of date, there is no need for the census or survey to collect *Service* data items that are already available from licensing or registration records.

### **Information on preschool enrolment forms**

Every jurisdiction has school enrolment (sometimes also known as student enrolment) forms which collect personal information on the students and their parents or guardians. However, state and territory education departments have access only to government school (including government preschool) enrolment information. They do not have access to enrolment information collected by non-government or local government preschools or child care centres.

In New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, preschool services (or kindergarten as it is known in Victoria) are largely provided by the non-government sector. The departments responsible for preschool services in these jurisdictions do not have access to non-government preschool enrolment data.

For the remaining jurisdictions, around eight data items on the public school enrolment form align well to the corresponding *Child* data items in the CSNMDS. These data items are:

- *Name*
- *Date of birth*
- *Sex*
- *Indigenous status*
- *Child with a disability*
- *Main language other than English spoken at home*
- *Family type*
- *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)*
- *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex.*

Of the data items listed above, the first seven are collected on all public school enrolment forms across the jurisdictions; the last two items (namely, *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)* and *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex*) are not collected by every jurisdiction or may not have the same concept or use the same definitions or categories as the CSNMDS items.

Enrolment information may be a useful data source for *Child* items in the CSNMDS for preschool children, notwithstanding the fact that a number of jurisdictions have expressed reservation about the quality of the information collected on their public school enrolment forms.

*Note:* The CSNMDS requires *letters of name* rather than the child's full name. *Letters of name*, *Date of birth* and *Sex* are used in the CSNMDS to derive a Statistical Linkage Key for each child.

### **Annual count of preschool enrolment numbers**

All jurisdictions collect enrolment numbers (disaggregated by age, sex, school year and Indigenous status) from their schools at least once a year to meet the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) reporting requirement.

Although preschool data are not currently part of the MCEETYA reporting requirement, a number of jurisdictions either have extended their school enrolment collection or conduct something similar in parallel, to cover public preschools. Western Australia also collects enrolment number from its private preschools. In the Australian Capital Territory, public preschool enrolment numbers are extracted twice a year from the education department's centralised administrative system (rather than collected from the schools directly). Preschool enrolment counts are provided to the Productivity Commission for the *Report on Government Services (ROGS)*. However, the data collected via this avenue are typically of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS because only a limited number of data items are collected and the data are collected at the aggregate level.

## Where the jurisdictions differ

The jurisdictions differ substantially in what (if any) additional statistical collections they undertake of their children's services.

**Queensland** and **South Australia** both conduct comprehensive annual censuses of all child care and preschool services in their jurisdictions. In both cases, the annual census is conducted by a single department in the jurisdiction, and multiple form types (7 in the case of Queensland and 11 in the case of South Australia) are used to cater for different service types. The child care part of the census is not mandatory in South Australia but the preschool part is mandatory. Participation in the Queensland children's services census is not mandatory at present; therefore response rates and data quality can vary substantially from year to year and between different parts (that is, different service types) of the collections.

**Western Australia** and the **Australian Capital Territory** do not conduct any statistical collection on their child care or preschools.

The remaining four jurisdictions lie somewhere in between. **New South Wales** conducts two annual censuses of its state-funded children's services – the Department of Community Services conducts a census of the children's services administered by the department, and the Department of Education and Training (DET) conducts a census of the 100 DET-funded preschools across the state. Participation is mandatory for both censuses. **Victoria** conducts an annual census of the kindergarten programs that are funded by the state government and participation in the collection is mandatory. However, there is no data collection on child care services. **Tasmania** runs a small statistical collection for their state-funded child care services for which participation is mandatory. However, there is no data collection for preschools. The **Northern Territory** conducts an annual survey to collect information on capacity, vacancies, fees and opening hours from child care services. All licensed child care services in the Territory are covered in the survey but participation is not compulsory. There is no collection on preschools.

## Alignment of state and territory collections to the CSNMDS

The degree of alignment to the CSNMDS varies substantially across the state and territory collections. Within collections, it also differs between the three components of the CSNMDS. For example, Queensland's children's services census maps very well to the *Service* and *Worker/caregiver* components of the CSNMDS but not to the *Child* component in terms of data item coverage. As well, the Queensland census collects only aggregate level data for children. It is evident, though, that Queensland has attempted to align its census to the CSNMDS as

much as possible. The South Australian children's services census also has good alignment to the CSNMDS in terms of the breadth of the data items collected. However, there are significant differences in question wording and concepts. South Australia has advised that a substantial level of resources would be required to fully align its collections to the CSNMDS. When used together with licensing information, the Victorian kindergarten collection largely meets the CSNMDS's information requirement on the *Services* and *Worker/caregiver* components but not on the *Child* component. The collections in New South Wales, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, in their current forms, do not align well generally to the CSNMDS.

Note that *outside school hours care* have different names in different jurisdictions. The variations include *outside school hours care*, *out of school hours care*, *out of school care* and *school age care*.

## **Non-financial data in the Report on Government Services**

In the course of the consultation, a number of jurisdictions mentioned that the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS) is where national data on children's services are published currently and suggested that the AIHW also examine the ROGS data collection manual in the mapping exercise. The ROGS reports children's services information using a performance indicator framework. Performance is measured in terms of outputs and outcomes, and outputs are measured in terms of Equity, Effectiveness and Efficiency. There is a good degree of alignment between the CSNMDS and the current children's services indicators in the ROGS. If the CSNMDS was to be implemented across the Australian Government and state and territory collections, it could be used to provide consistent national data for:

- part of the information required on the *special needs groups* for the Equity indicators
- most of the information required on the *service availability* component of the Effectiveness indicators
- about two-thirds of the information required on the *staff quality* component of the Effectiveness indicators.

The CSNMDS, in its current form, is not designed to provide the data for the Efficiency or Outcome indicators.

## **The National Preschool Census (previously known as the National Indigenous Preschool Census)**

The National Indigenous Preschool Census has been conducted annually since 1993 to measure preschool enrolment numbers of Indigenous children across Australia. Since 2005, the census has been broadened to capture some aggregate level data on preschool enrolments of all children and was renamed the National Preschool Census. Although this census covers all government and non-government preschools, only a limited number of data items are collected and the collection on its own is of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS.

Results from the data mapping exercise are presented in more detail in the remainder of this chapter.

# New South Wales

## Overview

The New South Wales Department of Community Services (DoCS) licenses child care and the 'majority' of preschool services in the state. Children can receive a preschool education program at a long day care centre *or* by attending a community-based preschool *or* a Department of Education and Training (DET) preschool. Community-based preschools (approx 800) are licensed by DoCS; most also receive DoCS funding. There are 100 DET preschools in the state. They are licensed by DoCS, funded by DET, and are physically attached to state-funded public schools.

DoCS conducts an annual census of the DoCS-funded children's services (including the non-DET preschools) using two data collection forms. Very few *Service* data items collected in the annual census are directly mappable to the corresponding items in the CSNMDS but the *Service* data items being collected via the licensing/registration processes are generally mappable. No unit record data are collected for staff or children in the DoCS census.

DET conducts an annual census of the DET preschools. Information is collected on students and teachers and data are submitted electronically to DET via a website interface. No *Service* data items and only a small proportion of the *Worker/caregiver* and *Child* data items from the CSNMDS are collected in the DET preschool census.

DET also has access to student information collected on public school enrolments, and this includes students enrolling in DET preschools. Seven data items on the enrolment form map well to the corresponding *Child* data items in the CSNMDS.

## Key features of New South Wales's children's services data collections

### DoCS

- DoCS conducts an annual census of the DoCS-funded children's services. In 2007, the two collection forms used were titled *Annual Service Plan & Reporting Document (ASPARD) for*
  - *Licensed Early Childhood Service Projects funded by DoCS* [this form covers long day care services, occasional care services, and non-DET preschools]
  - *Vacation Care Projects funded by DoCS*.
- Participation in the census is mandatory and the reference week for the collection (as specified by DoCS) is usually in September.
- Data are available for reporting purposes in July of the following year.
- Only aggregate data are captured for staff and children in the DoCS census.
- The data collection process has recently been reviewed and realigned with internal and external reporting requirements and DoCS funding reforms. The need for services to submit work plans has been removed and from 2008 the data collection will focus on reporting only.
- DoCS licenses long day care, occasional care and all preschools (including DET preschools). Seven data items on the licensing forms can be mapped to the corresponding

items in the CSNMDS: *Service address, Days of operation, Start time, Finish time, Legal entity, Service delivery setting, and Service activity types provided.*

- DoCS registers out of school hours care, and the following registration data items can be mapped to the corresponding CSNMDS *Service* data items: *Service address, Legal entity and Service activity types provided.*

## **DET**

- DET collects data annually from the 100 DET preschools via a website interface. Participation in this collection is mandatory.
- Data are usually collected with respect to the first Friday in August and are available for reporting purposes in mid-November of the same year.
- All four data items collected in the preschool census on teachers at the unit record level map reasonably well to the corresponding *Worker/caregiver* data items in the CSNMDS.
- Of the six unit record data items collected on students, three can be mapped to the corresponding *Child* items on the CSNMDS. The remaining three can only be partially mapped to the CSNMDS because only Yes/No/Not provided answers are collected.
- DET has advised that the student data on *Enrolment, Attendance, Aboriginality, language background other than English, Date of birth and Sex* can be extracted and analysed at the unit record level. However, the data on disability status and attendance 'pattern' have not been validated by DET.
- Although each student is required to be uniquely identified in the DET preschool census, only the student's initials are captured. As such, the data collected cannot be linked at the individual level to other data collected in future years.
- The teacher data collected in the census are not validated against other human resources data held by DET.
- DET also has access to DET preschool enrolment information. Seven data items on the enrolment form could be mapped to the following CSNMDS *Child* data items:
  - *Letters of name*
  - *Date of birth*
  - *Sex*
  - *Indigenous status*
  - *Child with a disability*
  - *Main language other than English spoken at home*
  - *Family type.*

## **Data coverage**

*Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- DoCS collects data on the following three CSNMDS *Service* items in the census: *Service address, Weeks of operation, and Fee schedules.*
- *Places offered* information is not collected in the DoCS collection but data are collected on the number of children attending in the reference week.

- *Service delivery mode* is collected only in the form for *Licensed Early Childhood Service Projects funded by DoCS*.
- The following items are not collected in the DoCS census but would be available from licensing records: *Days of operation, Start time, Finish time, Legal entity, Management type, Service delivery setting, Licensed places, Main service activity type* and *Service activity types provided*.
- *Service identifier* is not currently included on the form and there may be no need to include.
- *Service* data items are not collected in the DET preschool census but this is not an issue because DET would have the information required for data items which are relevant.

#### *Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- Neither of the DoCS census forms gathers *Worker/caregiver* data at the unit record level. Both forms collect information on the total number of paid staff, disaggregated by *Type of work performed, Qualification field, and Qualification level*. Detailed qualification data are collected for paid full-time, part-time and casual staff. Only staff numbers (i.e. no qualification information) are collected for unpaid staff/volunteers.
- The DET Preschool Census collects unit record level data (of teachers) on the following CSNMDS items: *Working arrangements, Qualification field, Qualification level* and *Length of time with current service*.

#### *Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

- The DoCS census collects only aggregated *Child* data. The form for *Licensed Early Childhood Service Projects funded by DoCS* collects information on the number of children attending in the reference week disaggregated by single years of age, special needs groups [such as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, disabilities and Aboriginality], and days of attendance per week.
- The form for *Vacation Care Projects* is shorter. It collects aggregate level data on the number of children who attended in each vacation period, by special needs groups.
- The DET Preschool Census collects unit record level data on the following five *Child* data items: *Date of birth, Sex, Indigenous status, Disability, and Language background other than English (LBOTE)*. However, for *Indigenous status, Child with a disability* and *LBOTE* the census allows only for a Yes/No/Not provided response, rather than providing for a range of categories, as in the CSNMDS specifications. Note that 'Not provided' is not an available option for the *Indigenous status* question.

## **Conceptual, question wording and/or scope differences**

Below are some marked differences between the CSNMDS and the NSW collections in the concept and wording of the questions.

### **DoCS**

- **Availability:** The *Licensed Early Childhood Service Projects* form collects the number of hours per week and the number of days per week the service opened in the reference week. The *Vacation Care Projects* form collects the number of weeks open per year. In

contrast, the CSNMDS requires more specific information about *Days of operation*, *Start time* and *Finish time*.

- Fees: The *Licensed Early Childhood Service Projects* form collects information on fee per hour for 0–3 year olds and 3–6 year olds. It also seeks information on the maximum fee that parents pay for a full day or a half-day by standard or special needs group. The *Vacation Care Projects* form simply collects fee per hour. The CSNMDS collects daily or weekly fees for children under 2 years and children aged 2 years and over.
- Age: The *Licensed Early Childhood Service Projects* form collects information on the age of the children in single years (0–11 months, 1 year to 23 months, 2 years to 2 years 11 months etc. up to 5 years to 5 years 11 months). The CSNMDS collects actual *Date of birth* for the child, which would allow the age information to be calculated as well as the construction of a Statistical Linkage Key for each child when used together with *Letters of name* and *Sex*.
- Special needs group: The CSNMDS questions on children with special needs follow closely the ABS-recommended standards. For example, the data item *Main language other than English spoken at home* actually collects information on the language spoken at the child's home; the data item on *Indigenous status* requires information on whether the child is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin or both or neither; the data item on *disability status* aims to collect information on the area of disability. In contrast, the categories in the DoCS census questions are much simpler: 'CALD', 'Disabilities', and 'Aboriginal'.
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) working/not working: The CSNMDS question follows closely the ABS-recommended standard and tries to capture whether the parents/guardians are working, or not working but looking for work, or not working and not looking for work. The new DoCS data collection no longer includes these questions.

## DET

- As indicated above, the DET Preschool Census collects a Yes/No/Not provided response for *Child with a disability*, *LBOTE* and *Indigenous status*, rather than more detailed information, as per the CSNMDS specifications.
- The DET Preschool Census collects information on the enrolled sessions attended during the reference week by each child and disaggregated by morning and afternoon (AM and PM are the actual terms used in the form). Although the census does not collect *arrival* and *departure* times as specified in CSNMDS, the information need (on exposure/use) is likely to be satisfied because the *start* and *finish* times of the sessions would be regular and the information would be available from the school or DET.

# Victoria

## Overview

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) is responsible for licensing and regulating centre-based children's services in the state, including kindergartens, centre-based long day care and occasional care. A range of other child care or education services, including family day care and care services for school-aged

children (e.g. outside-school-hours care), are not currently required to be licensed with the Victorian Government, but will be required to be licensed from May 2009.

Preschools are known as kindergartens in Victoria. Kindergarten programs must be licensed and meet the requirements of the *Children's Services Act 1996* and the *Children's Services Regulations 1998*, and are provided in a range of settings including purpose-built stand-alone kindergartens, community-based and privately operated child care centres, community halls and state and independent schools.

DEECD provides funding to eligible kindergarten programs for all eligible children in the year before school entry. Most kindergarten services also charge fees to parents and the services are responsible for setting their own fees.

In order to qualify for funding from the state government, kindergarten services in Victoria must employ qualified early childhood teachers to design and deliver the kindergarten program to children.

At present, the majority of kindergarten services in Victoria are provided by non-state government organisations (a small number are provided by primary schools). Local government provides kindergarten services and owns a high proportion of the infrastructure where non-profit organisations deliver kindergarten programs.

Although Regulation 16 of the *Children's Services Regulations 1998* in Victoria stipulates a core set of data items that must be included in each child's enrolment record, enrolment forms are different at each service and DEECD does not have access to the information.

DEECD conducts an annual census of the kindergarten programs that receive state government funding. Participation in the collection is mandatory for the program to receive ongoing funding. The data collected are mappable to about half of the CSNMDS *Service* data elements, to about two-thirds of the *Worker/caregiver* data elements, but only to about three of *Child* data elements at the aggregate level. Other *Service* data items are either collected or can be derived from licensing information.

Overall, the DEECD kindergarten collection, together with licensing information, largely satisfies the information needs of the *Service* and *Worker/caregiver* components of the CSNMDS with respect to funded kindergarten programs in Victoria. There is a data gap on the *Child* part of the CSNMDS with respect to kindergartens as DEECD collects only aggregate data on the child from licensed services. There is also a data gap on other children's services in the state because there is no equivalent data collection.

## Key features of Victoria's children's services data collection

- The form used for the annual *Confirmed kindergarten funding data collection* conducted by DEECD has two parts:
  - PF04-Part A: Funded Organisation Details [to be completed once only by the funded organisation]
  - PF04-Part B: Information pertaining to each individual children's service [to be completed for each licensed children's service location (belonging to the funded organisation) that is offering a funded kindergarten program]
- The reference week for the 2008 collection was 14-18 April 2008.

- Unit record data are collected on teachers and kindergarten assistants but only aggregate level data are collected on the children.

## Data coverage

### *Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- The *Confirmed kindergarten funding data collection* captures information on *Service address; Management type, Legal entity and Service activity types* provided with respect to the whole service; and *Days of operation and Fee schedules* with respect to the kindergarten program provided by the service. (This is because some kindergarten programs are provided at long day care centres.)
- Although specific *start and finish times* of the kindergarten program are not being collected, information is collected on *length of the sessions* provided each morning and afternoon by the days of the week, in hours and minutes.
- The data item *places offered* is not included on the form. However, in the kindergarten context, this is likely to be identical to *the number of children enrolled in the program*, which is collected. Note that services may have the licensed capacity to operate with higher numbers of children, but choose to have smaller groups for a variety of management reasons.
- The following CSNMDS *Service* data items are either directly captured or can be derived from information collected in the licensing process: *Service address, Service activity types provided, Main service activity types, Legal entity, Licensed places, Days of operation, Start time and Finish time*.
- *Service delivery mode* and *Service delivery setting* data are not captured in the licensing process or the kindergarten collection but may not be in scope because DEECD licenses only 'centre-based' children's services.
- If required, a unique *Service identifier* could be assigned by DEECD, as indicated in the CSNMDS specifications.
- The only remaining gap is therefore *weeks of operation*. However, in the kindergarten context, this is likely to be the same as the number of school weeks in the year and if it is different, DEECD would have the correct information at hand.

### *Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- The *Confirmed kindergarten funding data collection* captures unit record level data on the following CSNMDS *Worker/caregiver* items: *Worker/caregiver identifier; Total hours worked; Qualification field, Qualification level, Length of experience and Length of time with current service* of both kindergarten teachers and assistants; and *Educational enrolment status* of kindergarten assistants only.
- *Indigenous status* data are collected only at the aggregate level.
- Information on *Type of work performed* and *Specific role* are collected by default because only teachers and assistants are included (and separately identified) in the collection.
- Information on *Age group* is satisfied through the collection of actual date of birth of the teachers and assistants.

- The main data gaps are therefore: *Paid/unpaid, Working arrangements, Employment status and Sex.*

*Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

- The *Confirmed kindergarten funding data collection* captures aggregate level data on three CSNMDS *Child* data items: *Main language other than English spoken at home, Child with a disability and Indigenous status.* *Indigenous status* information is required in the DEECD collection to be disaggregated by *age of child as at 30 April* of the reference year and *sex.*
- *Letters of name* is collected only for children who are eligible and receiving a second year of a funded kindergarten program.

## **Conceptual, question wording and/or scope differences**

There are some significant differences between the CSNMDS and DEECD's *Confirmed kindergarten funding data collection* in terms of scope and wording of the questions. However, most of these differences reflect the fact that the CSNMDS was designed to cover all child care and preschool services, while DEECD collects data only on funded kindergarten programs. Some of the marked differences include the following:

- The CSNMDS requires information on *Days of operation, Start time and Finish time.* The DEECD collection asks for the length of sessions provided in each morning and afternoon of the reference week in hours and minutes. Although the questions are worded differently between the two collections, the CSNMDS information need is satisfied in this regard.
- For the *Service activity types provided* data element, the categories available for the DEECD question are *Kindergarten only* or *Kindergarten in combination with long day care in various forms.* Categories in the CSNMDS are mutually exclusive but allow respondents to tick multiple categories. Given that the DEECD collection is aimed at funded kindergarten services, the categories provided are appropriate.
- For the *Worker/caregiver identifier* data item, the relevant form's question uses the first three letters of the worker's given name, and his or her date of birth in six-number form. The CSNMDS only requires the service to allocate a unique three-digit unit identifier for the worker, so the DEECD's method more than satisfies the CSNMDS requirement.
- The DEECD kindergarten collection only requires information on the teachers and assistants because the collection is aimed at kindergarten programs. Most worker/caregiver data items in the CSNMDS relate to all paid contact workers/caregivers. In long day care settings, it is highly likely that the children will be involved with other paid contact caregivers apart from the teacher and the assistant.
- *Educational enrolment status* information is only required from kindergarten assistants. In the CSNMDS, this data item applies to all paid contact workers/caregivers. However, this difference is logical because, in order for the kindergarten program to receive funding in Victoria, the teacher employed must be fully qualified.
- *Letters of name* is only collected of children who are declared eligible and are receiving a second year of kindergarten in the reference year. In contrast, this data item applies to all children in the CSNMDS.

# Queensland

## Overview

*Note: At the time when this project was undertaken, the Queensland Department of Communities (DoC) was responsible for licensing and monitoring the provision of child care. A new Office for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has since been established to take the lead responsibility for children's early development, bringing together responsibility for early education and child care services in one agency. The ECEC is aligned with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts and reports to the Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts. The information below reflects the situation before the establishment of the ECEC.*

The Queensland Department of Communities (DoC) is responsible for licensing and monitoring the provision of child care under the *Child Care Act 2002* and *Child Care Regulation 2003*. This covered centre-based care (which includes long day care and limited hours care), kindergartens and home-based care (i.e. family day care).

The Queensland Government Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) provides funding for early learning programs for children aged 3½ to 4½ years (4 years by 30 June) in:

- community kindergartens under the Department of Education Community Kindergarten Assistance Scheme (DECKAS)
- pre-preparatory programs across 35 predominantly remote Indigenous communities under the *Bound for Success* strategy.

DoC has three child care licensing forms and a number of the data items on the licensing forms align well with the corresponding *Service* and *Worker/caregivers* data items in the CSNMDS. No child-based information is collected in the licensing forms as these forms pertain to the licensing of the service to provide child care.

DoC also conducts an annual census of its child care services (including kindergartens) using seven different data collection forms for various service types (long day care, kindergartens, etc.). In-home care, that is, care provided in the child's home, is in scope in the CSNMDS but not in the DoC census. Family day care, that is, care provided in the carer's home, is included in the DoC census.

Completion of the DoC census is not compulsory, except for state-funded services, and this has implications on the overall response rates and data quality of the collection.

Excluding the specific *Child* data items, Queensland's children's services census is highly comparable to the CSNMDS.

Nearly all of the CSNMDS *Service* data requirement is satisfied, either via direct collection of information, the practice of using different forms for different services, or via extraction of information from the administrative/licensing records. The only major difference is the questions on the fees schedule where the data cannot be mapped across because of the different age breakdowns and different timeframes. That being said, the fees question in the DoC census still provides useful information.

The majority of the *Worker/caregiver* data items in the CSNMDS are being collected in the DoC census at the unit record level. The exception is *Indigenous status*, which is collected only at the aggregate level. Although there are differences in some of the questions, the CSNMDS

information needs appear to be met. The main discrepancy seems to be the numbers of ancillary (non-contact) staff such as cooks and cleaners which are not included in DoC staff numbers, but are included in the CSNMDS as 'Other workers'.

Data about individual *children* is where the largest differences between the DoC census and the CSNMDS lie. Firstly, the DoC census collects only aggregate data for children. Secondly, even with in-home care being out of scope, only 3 out of 14 of the CSNMDS *Child* data items are captured in the DoC census.

The majority of mainstream kindergarten services in Queensland are provided by the non-government sector. DoC does not have access to enrolment information for children attending these services.

## Key features of the Queensland children's services census

- The Queensland children's services census comprises seven data collection forms:
  1. *FORM 1A Licensed Centre Based Services (Long Day Care/Occas. Care)*
  2. *FORM 1B Licensed Centre Based Services (Kindergarten & Other)*
  3. *FORM 1C Licensed Centre Based Services (State Funded)*
  4. *FORM 2 Licensed Home Based Services*
  5. *FORM 3 School Age Care Services*
  6. *FORM 3A Funded School Age Care*
  7. *FORM 4 Child & Family Services (State-funded)*
- Timing of the reference week for the collection is broadly the same each year: September for the two school-age care forms and August for the others.
- All forms collect unit record data for staff.
- Only aggregate level data are collected for children.
- The data are generally available for reporting purposes within 12 months of collection if the response rates are considered high enough to provide valid data. If the response rates are not considered high enough to provide valid data (e.g. in 2006), reports are not published that year. The Department of Communities has not set an acceptable minimum response rate for the publication of census data.
- For 2007, the response rates were between 85% and 91% for each of the service types, but there were some issues with data quality as not all census respondents answered all questions and some components of data had a lower response rate than the overall response rate.
- When finalised, the data are stored in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and are also included in the department's statistical information system.

## Data coverage

Excluding the data on children, most of the data items in the CSNMDS appear to be covered in the DoC census. As previously mentioned, the *Child* component in the DoC census is

collected at the aggregate level and CSNMDS items require collection at the unit record level. There are also very few CSNMDS 'Child' data items being collected.

#### *Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- All seven forms collect the following six CSNMDS data items: *Weeks of operation; Days of operation, Start time, Finish time, Service activity types provided, and Fee schedules.*
- *Service address* is pre-printed on all the forms before despatch.
- Six of the forms collect data on *Management type*; this item is not collected from state-funded child and family services (Form 4) as these are all community-based non-government services.
- Three of the forms (Forms 1A, 1B and 1C) collect data on *Service delivery setting* but only with respect to whether the service is provided at a school or a building purpose-built or renovated for the delivery of child care services. The 2008 census is planned to include additional questions about service delivery setting to include integrated service delivery and co-location with like services. Given that home-based services (i.e. family day care) have their own form (Form 2), there is no need to include the home-based data domain on the forms for centre-based services.
- DoC collects the *number of places available* through the licensing process. The census complements this by collecting *the number of children attending services*, because one licensed place could be accessed by a number of children at different times.
- Although none of the forms in the DoC census specifically collects information on *Main service activity type*, this data requirement appears to be covered via the use of separate forms for different types of services.
- Although none of the forms specifically collects information on *Legal entity, Licensed places, and Service delivery mode*, this information is available from the administrative or licensing records at DoC.
- DoC does not assign a unique *Service identifier* for each service included in the census.

#### *Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- All forms collect information on the following 12 data items: *Worker/caregiver identifier, Type of work performed, Paid/unpaid, Total hours worked, Specific role, Working arrangements, Age group, Sex, Qualification level, Educational enrolment status, Length of experience, and Length of time with current service.*
- None of the forms collects data on *Employment status* (as defined in the CSNMDS) and *Qualification field*.
- Only aggregate data are collected on *Indigenous status*.
- Forms 1A, 1B and 1C explicitly collect information on whether the service provides programs for children aged 3.5–4.5 years and/or 4.5–5.5 years by a qualified early childhood teacher or staff member with an Australian Qualification Framework qualification at the level of Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services). This is not a CSNMDS requirement but is an important policy-relevant question.

- Counts of staff in the DoC census exclude staff on sick or annual leave but include relief staff. This is consistent with the approach taken in the CSNMDS which excludes those on leave during the reference week.

#### *Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

- None of the forms collects *Child* data items at the unit record level.
- Aggregate data are collected on three of the *Child* items in the CSNMDS: *Indigenous status*, *Main language other than English spoken at home* and *Child with a disability*.
- Although data for arrival and departure times are not collected on the DoC forms, the three forms for state-funded services (i.e. Forms 1C, 3A and 4) collect total number of hours of care actually provided to children. Services are asked to add up the total hours of attendance for each child.
- Two of the CSNMDS 'Child' items, namely *Postcode* and *Suburb/town/locality name* are relevant only for children using in-home care. In-home care, which is care provided in the child's home, is not included in the census.

## **Conceptual, question wording and/or scope differences**

There are a number of conceptual and question wording differences between the CSNMDS and the DoC census but most could be mapped across with modest effort. The biggest differences in question wording are in relation to the following:

- For fees schedules, there were differences in age groupings, timeframes, or price-range levels between the CSNMDS and the DoC forms. For example, the CSNMDS *Fee schedule – family day care/in-home care* data element asks for the hourly standard fee for children aged less than 2 years, and also for children over 2 years. In comparison, the relevant DoC form, *Form 2 Licensed Home Based Services*, uses the two per-hour categories of 'under school age child', and 'school age child', as well as asking for minimum and maximum fee levels in each case. Therefore the data collected, though very useful, are not mappable to the CSNMDS.
- Data intended to be gathered via the two *worker/caregiver* data items, *Type of work performed* and *Specific role*, are collected in a single census question, namely *In what position did the person work during the census week*, with a number of categories which have different groupings from those in the CSNMDS.
- Data intended to be gathered via the two *worker/caregiver* data items, namely *Qualification level* and *Educational enrolment status*, are collected in a single data collection question titled *Staff Information: Qualifications*.
- There are a few other terminology discrepancies between CSNMDS requirements and the DoC census. For example, *Employment status* in the DoC census relates to full-time, part-time or casual basis of employment, whereas in the CSNMDS it relates to who the person is employed by (e.g. employee of the service, employee of a government agency/body). Whether or not an employee is full time, part time or casual relates to the CSNMDS data item *Paid contact worker/caregiver – working arrangements*. These are not insurmountable issues, but they may be issues for discussion and agreement at some later point in time.

In terms of commonality, five data items are common to both the CSNMDS and all DoC census forms. Specifically, the following four CSNMDS *Service* data elements can be easily mapped across: *Weeks of operation*, *Days of operation*, *Start time*, and *Finish time*. Also, the CSNMDS *Worker/caregiver* data element *Total hours worked* can be easily mapped across.

## **Additional information provided by DoC**

### **DETA pre-preparatory enrolments**

When DETA introduced the preparatory year in Queensland schools, the 'sessional' preschool year level ceased with the exception of a program designed specifically to cater for students in 35 identified Indigenous communities (pre-preparatory students). This initiative is part of the *Bound for Success: Education Strategy*. The aim of the initiative is to help schools and communities to shape the government's broader educational reforms for Queensland into tailored solutions to support students in the 35 communities to achieve success. The implementation of this initiative is designed to improve the attendance, participation, retention and achievement of students in the 35 Indigenous communities.

### **Data coverage and data items collected**

There are 28 state schools included in the Bound for Success pre-preparatory initiative. Thirty communities in the pre-preparatory program are covered by these schools. The remaining five communities have been or are to be provided with a pre-preparatory year program through a child care centre or kindergarten.

Each state school has a school management system that contains a great deal of information about each student who attends the school. This information is downloaded three times a year. The information is used to drive policy and fulfils the department's commitment to accountability and transparency including reporting to other state government departments and the Australian Government (ROGS).

Data items downloaded include: *Student Identification Number*, *Date of birth*, *Year level*, *Education Queensland Identification Number*, *Gender*, *Date enrolled*, *Indigenous status*, *Age*, *Family name*, *Given name*, and *Preferred name*.

# Western Australia

## Overview

The Western Australian Government's Department for Communities (DfC) administers child care in the state. Information relating to child care is collected via licensing and registration renewal processes only (i.e. there is no other collection of information on child care services beyond licensing). There are substantial conceptual differences between the data items in the CSNMDS and the information collected in the licensing forms.

Enrolment details are collected for each child enrolling in a child care service. The enrolment forms are designed by the service providers and DfC has no access to the information collected.

Preschools are known as kindergartens in Western Australia and are administered by the Department of Education and Training (DET). Attendance at kindergartens is not compulsory. Children have access to 11 hours of kindergarten per week during school terms.

Enrolment details are collected for each student enrolling in public schools. Seven of the data items in the enrolment form are very similar to those in the CSNMDS. There is no single equivalent enrolment form for students enrolling in non-government schools.

DET also conducts a school census twice a year, which includes both public and private kindergartens. This census collects the number of students by age, sex and Indigenous status only at the aggregate level. The information collected in the census may be of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS.

## Key features of Western Australia's children's services data collections

- The only collection of child care data is through the licensing and licence renewal processes. Licences are renewed every 3 years or when changes are made in the intervening period by the service.
- The licensing forms capture some information on operation times of the service, the number of children, the number of staff, and staff qualifications. However, these data items bear little resemblance to those in the CSNMDS.
- In the 3 months to October 2007, DfC conducted a one-off attitudinal survey for their Children's Services Regulations Review. The child care sector and families using child care were respondents to the survey. The questions in this survey bear no resemblance to the CSNMDS and thus are not relevant to this data mapping exercise.
- Kindergartens are managed by DET. Children enrolling in public schools are required to complete the *WA Public School Student Enrolment Form*. Enrolment data are stored in the schools' and DET's databases.
- Eight of the data items in the preschool enrolment form can be mapped to the following *Child* data items in the CSNMDS:
  - *Letters of name*

- *Date of birth*
  - *Sex*
  - *Indigenous status*
  - *Main language other than English spoken at home*
  - *Child with a disability – need for assistance*
  - *Family type*
  - *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s).*
- In addition to the information collected on enrolment, DET also collects enrolment numbers of kindergarten students via the twice-yearly school census. This census covers students from kindergarten to Year 12 and is conducted primarily to meet MCEETYA reporting requirements. Kindergarten information is not part of the MCEETYA requirement but is used for the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services*.
  - First semester information is collected on one of the days in February; second semester information is collected on the first Friday of August. Second semester data are used for reporting for the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services*.
  - The second semester census comprises five data collection forms:
    - *CP2 Community Kindergarten Second Semester Student Census*
    - *CP2A Community Kindergarten Second Semester Aboriginal Student*
    - *A2 Government Schools Second Semester Student Census*
    - *A2A Government Schools Second Semester Aboriginal Student Census*
    - *AN2-Table 3 in Second semester census (for independent and private schools).*
  - The completion of the census is mandatory, especially for independent and private schools, for funding purposes.
  - The data are generally available approximately 6–7 weeks after the census for reporting purposes. When finalised, the data are stored electronically.
  - The data collected in the census are the number of students by age, sex and Indigenous status. Data are collected only at the aggregate level and are of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS.

# South Australia

## Overview

In South Australia, child care is regulated by the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS). Preschool is operated/funded by DECS.

DECS has a number of different application forms for the licensing of child care centres and approval for family day care. However, very few data items (only one or two) from these licensing and approval forms could be mapped to the CSNMDS.

DECS also conducts an annual census of its children's services using 11 data collection forms, which are listed later in this report. Completion of the child care forms is not mandatory but completion of the preschool forms is mandatory.

Of the 10 forms that are in alignment with the CSNMDS, 6 collect unit record data for children (hereafter referred to as 'the long forms') and 4 collect aggregate child data (hereafter referred to as 'the short forms'). All forms collect unit record data for workers.

Overall, the AIHW is of the view that South Australia is well placed to consider implementation or partial implementation of the CSNMDS because there is already a reasonable degree of comparability (approximately 50%) between the long forms and the CSNMDS.

If only a partial implementation of the CSNMDS could be accommodated and/or only a selection of the forms were to be amended in the first instance, the AIHW would recommend focusing on the 'Child Care' and the 'Preschool' forms, as these two forms are used for a large proportion of the sector providing mainstream early childhood services and it is important to get a coherent picture across the two subsectors. However, South Australia has indicated its preferred approach is to focus on the DECS preschools in the first instance because the completion of child care forms is not mandatory.

A number of data items would need to be changed conceptually, or added to the two forms, in order to better align them with the CSNMDS. The AIHW is of the view that the highest priority data items are: *Fee schedules* for services; child's *Letters of name* and child's *Date of birth* (which are both included in the CSNMDS to enable the generation of the Statistical Linkage Key for each child); and child's *School status*.

The inclusion of workers/caregivers' *Indigenous status* on all forms in the suite (instead of the item just being collected on half of the forms only) and an expansion of the workers' qualification question to better align with national standards would also improve the current collection.

In addition to the children's services census, information on preschool students is collected via the school enrolment form. Eight of the data items in the enrolment form align well to those in the CSNMDS.

## Key features of South Australia's children's services data collections

- The annual census of children's services is run by DECS.

- The census comprises 11 separate data collections (i.e. 11 forms). A service will receive particular forms based on its registration and licence information.
- Early Learning Programs are out of scope of the CSNMDS because they are aimed at providing resources and support to parents through their child's everyday play-based activities, rather than formal child care or preschool services. The collection for Early Learning Programs is excluded from this report.
- Six of the forms collect unit record data for the children (the long forms). They are the census forms for:
  - Preschool Services
  - Playcentres
  - Integrated Services including Children's Centres
  - Children's Services Montessori Services
  - TAFE Child Care Centres
  - Child Care.
- The remaining four forms in the suite collect aggregate data for children (the short forms). Specifically, these are the census forms for:
  - Vacation Care
  - Rural Care Programs in Preschools
  - Out of School Hours Care
  - Occasional Care.
- All forms collect unit record data for workers.
- A Playcentre is a type of children's service offering one or two sessions per week, delivered in rural and outback South Australia where the number of 4 year olds is too small to operate a viable preschool. Playcentres are for children aged 0-5 years. Parents of children aged less than 3 years are expected to attend with their children. Attendance of parents is optional for children aged 3 and over. Services that require the attendance of the child and their parent/ guardian are currently excluded from the CSNMDS. Therefore, information for children aged less than 3 years old attending Playcentres are out of scope of the CSNMDS.
- The reference week for the collections is similar each year – usually in the first week of August (e.g. in 2007, it was 6-10 August or 6-12 August), which is during Term 3. The exception is the Vacation Care census which uses one of the weeks of the school vacation period between Term 3 and Term 4 (e.g. in 2007, it was 8-12 October).
- DECS advised that about 80% of census data is returned by late October to early November of the reference year. In February of the following year, the data are finalised and can be used for internal reporting purposes. However, until a formal sign-off within DECS occurs, the data are still considered to be 'preliminary' even at this stage. Most of the data are stored in an Oracle database.
- DECS allows service providers to indicate on most forms (via tick boxes) the type of services provided at the centre (e.g. family day care, long day care, respite care, occasional and emergency care, out of school hours care, vacation care). For example, a child care centre may provide long day care and occasional care services. The data

collected on the child care form are intended to cover the long day care services only. The centre may also be sent another form to report on its occasional care activities if the service is separately licensed. However, it is uncertain by looking at the forms whether any data matching is carried out (or indeed could be carried out) between forms for any particular service. In the absence of unique identifiers, it would be difficult to attribute children and staff to services types.

- DECS has also conducted its own data gaps analysis in assessing the compliance of its census to the CSNMDS. The department was of the view that a significant amount of work is required, in particular in systems development, in order for the census to fully comply with the CSNMDS.

## Data coverage

The following points highlight the areas of comparability between the DECS census and the CSNMDS:

### *Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- All ten of the forms collect data on the following four CSNMDS items: *Service address*, *Days of operation*, *Start time*, and *Finish time*.
- Six of the forms collect *Fee schedules* (i.e. forms for Preschool, Vacation Care, Integrated Services, Children's Services Montessori, TAFE Child Care, and Child Care).
- Five of the forms collect *Service activity types provided* (i.e. forms for Preschool, Integrated Services, Children's Services Montessori, TAFE Child Care, and Child Care).
- Three of the forms collect *Weeks of operation* (i.e. forms for Integrated Services, Children's Services Montessori, and Child Care).
- Two of the forms collect *Places offered* (i.e. forms for Rural Care Programs in Preschools, and Occasional Care).
- One of the forms collects *Licensed places* (i.e. form for Integrated Services).
- None of the forms directly collects the following four CSNMDS items: *Service delivery setting*, *Management type*, *Legal entity*, and *Main service activity type*.
- If required, both *Service identifier* and *Service delivery mode* would be assigned by DECS.

### *Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- All ten of the forms collect some information on the following ten CSNMDS items: *Worker/caregiver identifier*, *Type of work performed*, *Total hours worked*, *Specific role*, *Age group*, *Sex*, *Qualification field*, *Qualification level*, *Educational enrolment status*, and *Length of experience*.
- Eight of the forms collect *Length of time with current service* (i.e. forms for Vacation Care, Rural Care Programs in Preschools, Play Centres, Out of School Hours Care, Occasional Care, Children's Services Montessori, TAFE Child Care, and Child Care).
- Seven of the forms collect *Working arrangements* (i.e. forms for Preschool, Vacation Care, Out of School Hours Care, Integrated Services, Children's Services Montessori, TAFE Child Care, and Child Care).

- Five of the forms collect *Indigenous status* (i.e. forms for Preschool, Rural Care Programs in Preschools, Play Centres, Occasional Care, and Integrated Services).
- There is a data gap in the collection of *Paid/unpaid* and *Employment status*.

#### *Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

- All six long forms collect information on the following six CSNMDS items: *Sex*, *Postcode*, *Indigenous status*, *Main language other than English spoken at home*, *Child with a disability*, and *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)*.
- Three of the forms collect information on the number of preschool or pre-entry sessions attended in the reference week (i.e. forms for Preschool, Integrated Services, and Children’s Services Montessori). Although this is not one of the CSNMDS data items, a non-zero response to this question also, by default, covers the *Preschool service provided* data item on the CSNMDS.
- Two of the forms collect information on *Family type* (i.e. forms for Preschool, and Integrated Services).
- All four short forms collect aggregate data only on the following three CSNMDS data items: *Indigenous status*, *Main language other than English spoken at home*, and *Child with a disability*.
- There is a data gap in the collection of *Letters of name*, *Date of birth*, *Estimated date flag*, *Suburb/town/locality name*, *School status*, *Arrival time at service*, *Departure time from service*, and *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex*.

Note that, although data for child’s arrival and departure times are not specifically collected in the SA census, there are related questions on all long forms, except the form for Play Centres. For child care services, the related question is either ‘Total hours of care used during the reference week’ or ‘Total hours of Child Care used during the reference week’. For preschool services, the related question is ‘Number of Preschool or Pre-Entry sessions attended in the reference week’.

## **Conceptual, question wording and/or scope differences**

There are some differences between the CSNMDS and the SA census in the scope and wording of the questions. The areas which differ markedly are as follows:

- For *Fees schedules*, on three of the forms (i.e. Children’s Services Montessori, TAFE Child Care, and Child Care), the SA census asks for the ‘maximum’ weekly fee per child. However, the CSNMDS requires information on the fee per child, and usually by age of the child, but not a ‘maximum’ fee.
- The data required for *Type of work performed* and *Specific role* in the CSNMDS are collected in varying degrees in the single SA census question ‘Main Employment category’.
- Data for three *Worker/caregiver* data items, namely *Qualification field*, *Qualification level* and *Educational enrolment status*, are collected in varying degrees in a single SA data collection question. The wording of the SA question varies, but it can be either ‘Most relevant qualification’, ‘Relevant qualification’, or ‘Approved qualification appropriate to preschool and child care (inc overseas)’. In some cases there is no qualification level

information attributed to an SA category. In those cases, the SA category cannot be mapped accurately to the CSNMDS data item *Qualification level*.

- Though three of the SA forms collect information on *Preschool service provided* [to the child], the intent of the CSNMDS data item is to collect data on the provision of preschool services. In contrast, the three SA collection forms' questions aim to collect data on the attendance of preschool services in the reference week.
- Data for the two *Child* data items, *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex*, and *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)*, are collected in varying degrees using the combination of two SA data collection questions: *Female Parent/Guardian employment status* and *Male Parent/Guardian employment status*.
- The SA census covers only paid workers whereas the CSNMDS aims at collecting information for both paid and unpaid workers for four of the data elements.
- The SA census includes paid regular workers who are on leave during the collection week but excludes children who are away during the collection week. In contrast, the CSNMDS excludes workers who are on leave during the reference week but include children who usually attend but are away during the reference week.
- Note that despite apparent similarities in data coverage between the SA collections and the CSNMDS, the majority of the data items require some amendments either to the question and/or the coding system in order for them to fully comply with the CSNMDS. A significant amount of work and thus resources would be required in this regard.

*Note:* The forms reviewed for this mapping exercise were titled *Annual Census of—*

*Child Care*

*Preschool Services*

*Integrated Services including Children's Centres*

*Children's Services Montessori Services*

*TAFE Child Care Centres*

*Playcentres*

*Vacation Care*

*Rural Care Programs in Preschools*

*Out of School Hours Care*

*Occasional Care*

*Early Learning Programs* (out of scope for the CSNMDS).

## **Preschool enrolment form**

In addition to the DECS annual census for children's services, the preschool enrolment form is another source of data for preschool children. Eight data items on the preschool enrolment form align well to the corresponding items in the CSNMDS:

- *Letters of name*
- *Date of birth*

- *Sex*
- *Indigenous status*
- *Main language other than English spoken at home*
- *Family type*
- *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex*
- *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s).*

# Tasmania

## Overview

Department of Education (DoE) Tasmania administers both child care and preschool services in the state.

DoE has one application form for a licence to operate centre-based child care and another for a licence to operate an approved registration body. Both of these forms have a separate Schedule of Personnel to collect staffing information. However, only two to three data items from these forms align to data items in the CSNMDS and the information is not accessible as collated data.

In addition to information collected via the licensing process, DoE conducts mandatory data collections for its state-funded child care services. There is no equivalent data collection for non-state-funded child care.

The DoE child care collections include only a small subset of the data items contained in the CSNMDS. Some of the *Service* data items in the CSNMDS, though not included in the collection, are available from DoE's licensing records. *Worker/caregiver* and *Child* information are collected only at the aggregate level at present.

DoE has advised that because of the current simplicity of its child care collection forms, changing some of the questions would not be difficult. However, the department does not currently have expertise and resources to implement the CSNMDS.

Preschool is known as kindergarten in Tasmania and is typically offered on a 10 hours per week basis. Student information is collected on enrolment. Seven of the data items on the enrolment form correspond to their equivalent in the CSNMDS.

Kindergartens provide enrolment information for the DoE data collection, but it is not reported on as it is not required for MCEETYA reporting.

## Key features of Tasmania's children's services data collections

- The child care census conducted by DoE comprises three main data collection forms:
  - *Statistical Return for Neighbourhood Model Occasional Care Services* (occasional care)
  - *Statistical Return for Play Centres* (sessional occasional care for 3–5 year olds)
  - *Statistical Return for Vacation Care* (these are for State funded services that don't meet Commonwealth funding requirements)
- These main collections are conducted once a year. The *Neighbourhood Model* collection and the *Play Centres* collection are both run in August. The collection for *Vacation Care* is run during the September school holidays. If a particular service is not operational during that time, data are collected in another school holiday period for that service.
- Data for the *Neighbourhood Model* collection are also obtained in the months of March, June and December each year (in addition to August). However, these three collections are less comprehensive than the one in August and only the August data are used for the *Report on Government Services* (ROGS). Data captured from the other three collections in the year are for internal use by DoE.

- Tasmania has around 280 licensed child care centres, and 11 family day care facilities. Only 27 of the child care centres are state-funded (and therefore only these are required to supply data). Although the *Neighbourhood Model Services* are jointly funded by Tasmania and the Commonwealth, it has been the State's responsibility to report on these services, as the state administers the funding on the Australian Government's behalf.
- *Worker/caregiver* and *Child* data are collected only at the aggregate level in the child care collections.
- Services are required to send in their data within 2 weeks following the data collection week. Data are provided to DoE in paper format and there is no special reporting arrangement for services in rural and remote areas.

## Data coverage

Data mapping was carried out between the Tasmanian child care collections and the CSNMDS.

*Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- Data collected on *Licensed places* and *Places offered* correspond to those in the CSNMDS.
- Although *Start times* and *Finish times* are not collected, information is collected on the *total number of hours open* in the collection week.
- Data are not collected for *Service types provided* and *Main service activity type* but this information need is met via the use of service-specific forms.
- No information is collected on *fee schedule*.
- The following CSNMDS data items are not collected: *Service address*, *Weeks of operation per year*, *Days of operation per week*, *Management type*, *Service delivery mode*, *Service delivery setting* and *Legal entity*. However, all of these are collected on the child care licensing forms and thus are available from the DoE's administrative or licensing records.
- *Service identifier* can be allocated by DoE if required.

*Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- The Tasmanian collections include only four of the CSNMDS data items on *Worker/caregiver* and data are collected at the aggregate level.
- *Type of work performed* and *Total hours worked* correspond to their equivalent in the CSNMDS; *Qualification level* and *Length of experience* partially correspond to their equivalent in the CSNMDS.

*Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

- The following four *Child* data items are collected, but only at the aggregate level: *Age*, *Indigenous status*, *Main language other than English spoken at home*, and *Child with a disability*.
- Although *Arrival time at service* and *Departure time from service* are not collected, aggregate data on a service's *number of hours used* in the reference week is collected.

## Conceptual, question wording and/ or scope differences

The following two *Service* data items in the Tasmanian child care collections are comparable to those in the CSNMDS: *Licensed places* and *Places offered*.

The *Worker/caregiver* and *Child* data items are not comparable because they are collected at the aggregate level only.

Seven of the data items in the kindergarten enrolment form (namely *Date of birth*, *Sex*, *Main language other than English spoken at home*, *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex*, *Indigenous status*, *Family type*, and *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)*) are conceptually comparable to their equivalent in the CSNMDS.

## Kindergarten enrolment form

An enrolment form is required to be filled out for each kindergarten student. Eight data items on the form can be mapped to the following *Child* data items in the CSNMDS:

- *Letters of name*
- *Date of birth*
- *Sex*
- *Indigenous status*
- *Main language other than English spoken at home*
- *Family type*
- *Parent(s)/guardian(s) – sex*
- *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)*.

# Australian Capital Territory

## Overview

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS) in the Australian Capital Territory is responsible for the licensing and monitoring of child care services. The only data collection for child care in the Territory is via the licence application forms and updated staffing forms. The *Service* information on the licensing forms is broadly comparable to the relevant items in the CSNMDS. The *Worker/caregiver* and *Child* information is not comparable.

Public preschools are managed by the Department of Education and Training (DET). Preschool services are offered in short or long day sessions (to a maximum of 12 hours per week) in the year before kindergarten. There are also non-government preschools in the Territory.

In 2008, the ACT Government amalgamated public preschools with public primary schools, to create 'P to 6' primary schools. From 2009, four new public early childhood schools will operate as early learning and development centres providing integrated services for children (birth to 8 years) and their families. In addition to preschool to Year 2 classes, these services may include child care, family support services and other services that support children's learning, health and wellbeing.

Similar to the situations in Western Australia and Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory does not run any data collection specifically for preschool children. Data are collected on the school enrolment forms and the only statistical collection is the twice yearly school census conducted by DET to meet MCEETYA reporting requirements.

Six of the data items on the enrolment form correspond to their equivalent in the CSNMDS. The additional form required to be filled in specifically for preschool enrolment captures information on the children's care arrangements.

## Key features of ACT's children's services data collections

- DHCS collects child care data only through licensing.
- Some of the *Services* information collected is comparable to that in the CSNMDS.
- Unit record *Worker/caregiver* data are collected via the staff planning forms, but most of the information included could not be mapped to the CSNMDS. The primary focus of *worker/caregiver* data in the licensing forms seems to be around security and safety (e.g. whether a police check has been completed for the staff member, the expiry date of first aid certificates, child-to-staff ratios).
- The *Child* information collected on the licensing forms is age range and the maximum number of children to be cared for by the service.
- Preschool data are collected by DET via the following forms:
  - *Student Record System: Enrolment Form*
  - *Additional Information Required for Children Enrolling in Preschool.*

- The use of the above forms is limited to public preschools. Data are not available for non-government preschool services.
- Eight data items in the school enrolment form can be mapped to the following *Child* data items in the CSNMDS:
  - *Letters of name*
  - *Date of birth*
  - *Sex*
  - *Indigenous status*
  - *Main language other than English spoken at home*
  - *Family type*
  - *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s)*
  - *Sex of parents/guardians.*
- The *Additional Information Required for Children Enrolling in Preschool* form collects additional child care information for children enrolling in preschools.
- DET believes that enrolment data can be extracted and de-identified for analytical purposes.
- The school census is run in February and August each year, and covers preschools to Year 12 for public schools and kindergarten to Year 12 for Catholic and independent schools. The main purpose of the census is to collect enrolment numbers. The data collected are therefore of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS.

# Northern Territory

## Overview

Child care in the Northern Territory is administered by the Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS). A limited amount of licensing information could be mapped to CSNMDS data elements. DHCS also conducts an annual survey of child care services using three data collection form types. These surveys collect information on capacity, vacancies, fees and opening hours.

Preschools are administered by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). DEET collects counts data for school enrolment and attendance eight times per year. Although preschools are in the scope of this collection, the data are of limited use in the context of CSNMDS. DEET also conducts an annual collection of staff and students numbers to satisfy the MCEETYA reporting requirement but, again, the data collected are of limited use in the context of the CSNMDS. As per other jurisdictions, eight data items in the school enrolment form align well with the corresponding *Child* data items in the CSNMDS. However, parental consent is required for access to these data.

## Key features of the Northern Territory's children's services data collections

- Three forms were used for the 2008 *Child Care Vacancies, Fees and Opening Hours Information Survey* conducted by DHCS. The following types of service are covered in the survey:
  - child care centres (i.e. centre-based long day care)
  - outside school hours care services, including vacation care
  - family day care/home-based care scheme
- All licensed long day care, all family day care, and outside school hours care that are not located in remote areas are in the scope of the survey. Participation in the survey is not mandatory and response rates vary between the forms and between years.
- The survey is conducted annually, usually in February. Data are available within 3 months of collection, but are for internal departmental use only.
- The survey collects information on capacity, vacancies (and the number of children on the waiting list in the case of long day care), fees and opening hours. The family day care form also collects information on the number of children using, and registered carers providing, care outside the hours of 7.30 am and 5.30 pm Monday to Friday. No other carer or child information is collected in the survey.
- DHCS licenses child care services in the Northern Territory, and a small number of licensing data items, such as service address and staff qualification, can be broadly mapped to the CSNMDS.
- Collection of information for preschool students is done by DEET via:
  - the enrolment and attendance data collection for preschool to Year 12 (conducted eight times a year)

- Staff Census for all schools (conducted every August)
- Age/Grade Census for all schools (conducted every August).
- Participation in the schools collection is mandatory.
- Eight items from the student enrolment form align with the following *Child* data items in the CSNMDS:
  - *Letters of name*
  - *Date of birth*
  - *Sex*
  - *Indigenous status*
  - *Child with a disability – need for assistance*
  - *Main language other than English spoken at home*
  - *Family type*
  - *Working arrangements of parent(s)/guardian(s).*

## Data coverage

### *Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- All three child care collection forms collect detailed information on *Fee schedules*.
- Although all the forms ask for capacity information, the question allows services to choose whether to provide the number of licensed or approved places or the maximum capacity established by the service itself.
- The form for outside-school-hours care collects data on *Service activity types* provided.
- The forms for child care centre and outside-school-hours care collect information on operating hours. Although operating hours is not one of the CSNMDS data items, depending on how the answers are provided the data could meet the need for information on *Days of operations*, *Start time* and *Finish time*.
- The forms do not collect other service information.

### *Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

- The forms for child care centres and outside-school-hours care do not collect any *Worker/caregiver* information. The family day care form collects the number of registered carers providing care outside the hours of 7.30 am and 5.30 pm Monday to Friday.
- Staff qualification information is required for the licensing process for child care services.
- The annual Staff Census conducted by DEET collects information on the number (and Full time equivalent ) of staff by their function at the school, sex, and Indigenous status.

### *Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

- The forms for child care centres and outside-school-hours care do not collect any *Child* information. The family day care form collects the number of children (aged 0–2, 2–3, 3–5, 5–12) receiving care outside the hours of 7.30 am and 5.30 pm Monday to Friday.

- The annual Age/Grade Census conducted by DEET collects the number of students by age, sex, school year, and Indigenous status.
- Enrolment and attendance counts are captured in the Enrolment and Attendance collection.

### **Conceptual, question wording and/ or scope differences**

There is limited alignment between the data items in the CSNMDS and those in the various collections currently being undertaken by the Northern Territory. The only exception is the 7 data items in the student enrolment form listed above. The fee schedule questions in the child care survey are quite detailed. However, the overlapping age ranges of 0-2, 2-3, 3-5 and 5-12 reduce the questions' alignment to the CSNMDS.

# Report on Government Services (ROGS)

## Summary

The Productivity Commission releases a *Report on Government Services (ROGS)* in January of each year. This report includes a chapter on children's services.

The *2007-08 ROGS Non-financial Data Collection Manual Version 7.1* for the Children's Services Working Group was used in this data mapping exercise. This data collection manual sets out the data items, definitions, classifications and counting rules agreed to by the Children's Services Working Group for the non-financial data in the children's services chapter. The corresponding manual for financial data, which is used to guide the compilation of government expenditure data, is largely irrelevant to this mapping exercise except in instances where the financial data are divided by the non-financial data (for example, expenditure per child attending services). It is therefore important that the scope of the financial data matches the scope of the non-financial data.

There are two fundamental differences between the specifications in the ROGS non-financial data collection manual for children's services and the CSNMDS and these differences largely reflect the different purposes of the collections. First, data for the ROGS are provided and reported at the aggregate level; the CSNMDS requires unit record level data. Second, some indicators in the ROGS are further disaggregated by level of government (i.e. Australian Government and state and territory); this level of disaggregation is not explicit in the CSNMDS.

In terms of using the CSNMDS as a basis of providing data for the current non-financial tables in the children's services chapter of the ROGS, the first difference is not an issue because unit record level data, once collected by the jurisdictions, can be aggregated to provide the required aggregate level data for the ROGS. Furthermore, the unit record data provided by the CSNMDS allows a greater degree of flexibility in data analysis and reporting. The second difference is also not a problem if both levels of government implement the CSNMDS and continue to provide separate data to the ROGS.

There is a good degree of alignment between the CSNMDS and the current children's services indicators in the ROGS. If the CSNMDS is implemented across the Australian Government and state and territory collections, it could be used to provide consistent national data for:

- part of the information currently required on the *special needs groups* for the Equity indicators
- most of the information currently required on the *service availability* component of the Effectiveness indicators
- about two-thirds of the information currently required on the *Staff quality* component of the Effectiveness indicators.

The CSNMDS in its present format is not designed to provide the data for the Efficiency or Outcome indicators.

Note that the children's services chapter of the ROGS will be reviewed in 2009 for the 2010 report. This review is partly in response to COAG developments in the children's services area. Although the CSNMDS data items appear comparable to some the current ROGS data

items, the degree of alignment may change if there are changes to the indicators in the children’s services chapter.

## Key features of the ROGS children’s services non-financial data collection

- The *ROGS Non-financial Data Collection Manual* for children’s services has separate but comparable counting rules for national and state and territory data.
- Data are required with respect to a sample week in the relevant financial year. However, the timing of the sample week, particularly in relation to the child care data, varies between the Australian Government collection and state and territory collections and also across the states and territories.

## Data coverage

*Service* (15 CSNMDS data items)

Seven of the 15 *Service* data items in the CSNMDS can either directly provide or be used with other CSNMDS data items to derive the required information for some of the children’s services indicators in the ROGS.

CSNMDS data item	ROGS indicator type	ROGS data item
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weeks of operation</li> <li>• Days of operation</li> <li>• Start time</li> <li>• Finish time</li> <li>• Service activity type provided</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (non-standard hours)	Proportion of child care services providing non-standard hours of service by service type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service activity type provided</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (number of services)	The number of Commonwealth-approved (or state/territory-funded and/or provided) services by service type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start time</li> <li>• Finish time</li> </ul> Service activity type provided	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (utilisation rates)	The denominator for  Utilisation rates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management type</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (management type)	Total licensed and/or registered services by management type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fees schedules</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Affordability	Child care service costs

*Worker/caregiver* (15 CSNMDS data items)

Five of the 15 *Worker/caregiver* data items in the CSNMDS can be used to derive the required information for some of the children’s services indicators in the ROGS.

CSNMDS data item	ROGS indicator type	ROGS data item
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualification field</li> <li>• Qualification level</li> <li>• Length of experience (as a paid contact worker in the children's services sector)</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Indicator  Quality—Staff (qualification and experience)	Qualifications and experience of primary contact staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid/ unpaid</li> <li>• Type of work performed</li> </ul> (count of staff in the cross categories above by services activity type provided)	Effectiveness Indicator  Quality—Staff (number of staff)	Total staff in Commonwealth-approved (or state/territory-funded and/or provided) child care services

*Child* (16 CSNMDS data items)

Seven of the 16 *Child* data items in the CSNMDS can be used to derive the required information for some of the children's services indicators in the ROGS. In addition, a count of the total number of children by service activity type can also provide additional information.

CSNMDS data item	ROGS indicator type	ROGS data item
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date of birth</li> <li>• Indigenous status</li> <li>• Main language other than English spoken at home</li> <li>• Child with a disability</li> </ul>	Equity Indicator  Participation rates for special needs groups	Part of the numerator for  Proportion of special needs groups using child care services relative to their population proportions  (ROGS also requires data on children in regional and remote areas and children in low income families which cannot be provided by the CSNMDS)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date of birth (together with a count of the number of records in each required age group)</li> </ul>	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (children attending)	The number of children using Commonwealth-approved (or state/territory-funded and/or provided) formal child care services by age category
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrival time at service</li> <li>• Departure time from service</li> </ul> (by <i>Service activity types provided</i> and a count of the total number of children in each service type)	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (hours of attendance)	Average hours of attendance by service type
A count of the number of children in the preschool category of <i>Service activity types provided</i>	Effectiveness Indicator  Access—Service Availability (children attending preschool)	Children attending preschool

# The National Preschool Census (formerly known as the National Indigenous Preschool Census)

The National Indigenous Preschool Census has been conducted annually since 1993, and aims to measure the number of Indigenous children enrolled in a preschool. It is commissioned by the Australian Government department responsible for education (currently DEEWR) and conducted by Data Analysis Australia – see the Technical Report (Data Analysis Australia 2008).

The Australian Government, through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP), provides supplementary recurrent funding to education providers with Indigenous enrolments on a per capita basis. Since 1998, the level of IESIP funding provided has been linked to the enrolment figures collected in the National Indigenous Preschool Census.

In 2005, the collection was renamed the National Preschool Census. Extra questions were added to collect age and sex data for all children, and to collect basic staffing data. In 2007 a question on absenteeism was included for the non-government preschool component of the census.

The collection covers all government and non-government preschools in Australia. For the purpose of this collection, government preschools are defined as preschools that are administered by the department of education in each state and territory. Data are collected via various arrangements in each state and territory. Data for government preschools are provided by the state and territory departments responsible for preschools in their jurisdictions. However, not all states and territories provide the required information in the same format and not every jurisdiction provides less critical information, such as staff counts or staff counts by Indigenous status. Data for non-government preschools are collected from the service providers via a mail-out questionnaire.

## Data coverage

In the 2007 census, aggregate level data were requested for:

- the number of staff (by role, total staff and Indigenous status)
- the total number of children enrolled (by sex and age)
- the number of all children and of Indigenous children absent for one or more sessions in the reference week of the census (for the non-government preschools only).
- the number of Indigenous children enrolled in the reference week

Unit record data on date of birth, sex, total hours per week enrolled and sessions enrolled were collected for Indigenous students only.

## Alignment to the CSNMDS

The National Preschool Census covers similar ground to the annual count of preschool enrolments that some jurisdictions undertake. Both the National Preschool Census and the annual count of preschool enrolment numbers capture a small number of data items related to enrolment. The advantage of the National Preschool Census in comparison to the 'counts' undertaken within some jurisdictions is that it covers non-government preschools as well as

government preschools. However, there is very little similarity between the National Preschool Census and the CSNMDS.

# 4 Consultation with Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

## Overview

A significant proportion of the data items in the CSNMDS were incorporated in the 2006 Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS). However, the AGCCCS will no longer be continued in its current form as a result of the implementation of the new Child Care Management System (CCMS). Where applicable, CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated into the development of the CCMS. The CCMS is a transaction management system and has a narrower scope than the AGCCCS. Some of the AGCCCS data items, such as those in relation to Worker/caregivers, are not currently collected in the CCMS. In order to satisfy the reporting requirement for the *Report on Government Services (ROGS)*, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has conducted a small supplementary data collection in 2008. CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated in the supplementary data collection where applicable.

## Meetings with Australian Government departments

Before the face-to-face meetings with the state and territory representatives, the consultant engaged by the AIHW met with the then Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) to discuss this feasibility study. At this time, the new CCMS was still being developed to be progressively rolled out in early 2008, and the abolition of the AGCCCS was foreshadowed. It was agreed that proper consultation with FaCSIA and DEST (i.e. Phase 2 of this feasibility study) would begin after early 2008.

The responsibility for child care at the Australian Government level was transferred from FaCSIA to the new Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in early 2008. The AIHW met with DEEWR in May 2008 in relation to this project and again in September. The following information was provided by DEEWR in September 2008.

## What is the Child Care Management System?

The CCMS is a national transaction management system set up to bring all Child Care Benefit (CCB) approved child care services online to standardise and simplify the administration of CCB. Child care services must have CCMS-registered software to record child enrolment and attendance information; this information is reported to DEEWR via the Internet to allow calculation and payment of CCB fee reductions on behalf of children in their service.

## **Incorporation of the CSNMDS data items into the Australian Government's child care data collections**

A significant proportion of the data items in the CSNMDS were incorporated into the 2006 AGCCCS when the then FaCSIA was responsible for the census. Where applicable, CSNMDS data definitions were also incorporated into the development of the CCMS. The CCMS has a narrower scope than the AGCCCS and therefore some of the data items in the AGCCCS, such as those in relation to Worker/caregivers, are not currently collected in the CCMS.

In order to satisfy the reporting requirement for the ROGS, DEEWR conducted a small supplementary data collection in 2008. This collection captured a small amount of information on services and Worker/caregivers and aggregate level data on children with special needs. CSNMDS data definitions were incorporated into the supplementary data collection where applicable.

## **Data reporting capability of the CCMS**

The CCMS is still in its early days of operation and at the time of the consultation with DEEWR, not all approved child care services in Australia have made a transition to the system. A number of issues (including data reporting policies) were still to be examined and/or resolved. From a technical point of view, the CCMS is a transaction management system and, as such, has very limited data reporting capabilities. DEEWR and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) have produced a Child Care Benefit Information (CCBI) data warehouse, which is the storage data warehouse facility for child care information sourced from CCMS. Because of the complexity of the CCBI data warehouse, DEEWR is building a 'presentation layer' to sit on top of the data warehouse environment. This 'presentation layer' contains a series of data files reflecting the way the Australian Government interacts with child care service providers. The type of information includes child care usage, agreement schedules and families information. However, much of these data are being collected within the administration of *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and are not available for external use.

## **Longer term direction of the CCMS**

The CCMS has good data collection capability. It may be possible in future years to expand the scope of the CCMS, but longer term direction of CCMS has not been decided.

## 5 Conclusion and the way forward

The CSNMDS is a set of tested and nationally agreed data items and standards that can be used to form the 'core' of any new data collections for child care and preschools. The Australian Government Census of Child Care Services incorporated a significant proportion of the CSNMDS data items into its 2006 edition. However, this census is not an ongoing collection. DEEWR has advised that much of the data being collected by the new CCMS are for the administration of *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and not available for external use.

There are substantial variations across the states and territories in the way children's services are administered at present. Services and programs are managed and delivered in different ways, and different mechanisms are used to collect children's services data in each jurisdiction. There are clear gaps in some jurisdictions in terms of data coverage for the children's services sector.

The degree of alignment to the CSNMDS varies substantially across the state and territory collections and, overall, only a very small number of these data collections in their present forms align well with parts of the CSNMDS. Within collections, the degree of alignment differs significantly between the three components of the CSNMDS. The *Service* component of the CSNMDS is the most straightforward for the jurisdictions to collect data for because of each jurisdiction's responsibility for licensing and/or registering services. This is followed by the *Worker/caregiver* component because jurisdictions have the authority to collect data in this area. Data for the *Child* component of the CSNMDS are difficult for the jurisdictions to collect because states and territories do not have the legislative authority to collect unit record data on children from service providers in the private sector.

The objective of establishing a collection that is comprehensive and national in coverage remains to be achieved. Although most jurisdictions have done little to date in implementing the CSNMDS in a systematic manner, all jurisdictions were in favour of retaining it, and see the CSNMDS as a useful start in setting up nationally consistent data collections. There was also recognition that the Australian Government's policies on 15 hours per week universal access to preschool and COAG's early childhood learning working groups may provide some impetus for the collection of nationally consistent data. That said, there was also the expectation that such an initiative would need to be accompanied by substantial Australian Government funding. The policy direction set by COAG for children's services and the associated information implications will obviously have an important influence on the future of the CSNMDS.

### AIHW's suggestions on the path forward

If it is not feasible in the current environment to implement the CSNMDS as a separate collection, a staged or progressive incorporation of the CSNMDS data items into existing collections would still make significant improvements to national information over time, providing there is an agreed plan and mechanism to collate and report the data nationally.

If national data from the CCMS cannot be made available, it will take a significant amount of resources to expand and align the state and territory collections to a broadly common level, to enable the reporting of even part of the CSNMDS data items for the child care subsector.

A national agreement on the required data items, data collection responsibilities, implementation of the CSNMDS data standards across existing collections, and national reporting by collating data from the CCMS and the other sources is a more effective and economic option.

For the way forward:

- Ensure that CSNMDS data items that were signed off in 2005 meet the data needs of the current COAG policy
- Make a decision on whether to implement CSNMDS, either as a whole or in part. States and territories have signalled that they are looking to COAG for this overall policy direction.
- If the decision on implementation is yes, develop a national CSNMDS implementation plan for child care and preschools that details data requirements, data collection, collation and national reporting arrangements and responsibilities. This implementation plan needs to be agreed to by the Australian Government and the state and territory governments.

Early childhood issues are high on the priority of the COAG agenda at present and the environment presents an ideal opportunity to discuss and implement national reporting on the CSNMDS.

# Appendix 1: Sectors and nomenclature

There is considerable variation between jurisdictions in their administrative arrangements and nomenclature as detailed in the following table:

Jurisdiction	Departments responsible for children's services	Nomenclature for preschool and pre-Year 1	Preschool/School commencement
New South Wales	Dept of Community Services (DoCS) [for child care and approx. 800 community-based preschools]  Dept of Education and Training (DET) [for 100 preschools that are attached to public schools]	Preschool Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In NSW, children can receive a preschool education by attending a community-based preschool or a DET preschool or a long day care centre.</li> <li>Community-based preschools are licensed by DoCS. Most, but not all, services also receive funding from DoCS.</li> <li>DET preschools are funded by DET, licensed by DoCS and physically attached to state public schools.</li> <li>Preschool programs are also offered at long day care centres.</li> <li>Kindergarten is the first year of primary schooling.</li> <li>Children may enrol in kindergarten at the beginning of the school year if they turn 5 years old on or before 31 July that year.</li> <li>Compulsory schooling starts at 6 years of age.</li> </ul>

*(continued)*

Jurisdiction	Departments responsible for children's services	Nomenclature for preschool and pre-Year 1	Preschool/School commencement
Victoria	Dept of Education and Early Childhood Development	Kindergarten Prep (Preparatory year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kindergarten is a 1-year education program primarily for children aged 4 years, and for 3-year-old children within the child protection system and for Indigenous children, funded by the Victorian government.</li> <li>Funded kindergarten programs are delivered in a range of settings including long day care.</li> <li>Kindergarten programs are also offered to 3 year olds in a range of private and community services. Parents cover the cost of these programs through fees.</li> <li>Prep is the first year of primary schooling.</li> <li>Children must be 5 years of age or older by 30 April of the year they start school.</li> <li>Compulsory schooling starts at 6 years of age.</li> </ul>
Queensland	<p>Dept of Communities (Child care licensing and monitoring including kindergarten)</p> <p>Dept of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) (Funding community kindergartens and Pre-Prep programs across 35 Indigenous communities; and delivering a non-compulsory Preparatory Year in state schools and accrediting non-state schools to deliver Prep )</p>	<p>Kindergarten</p> <p>Pre-Prep (Pre-Preparatory Year)</p> <p>Prep (Preparatory Year)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kindergarten, which is funded by DETA, can be accessed by children 3½ to 4½ years of age.</li> <li>In addition, DETA funds access to pre-Prep for children aged 3½ to 4½ years across 35 Indigenous communities.</li> <li>Prep is delivered in state schools (through DETA) and in non-state schools, for children aged 4½ to 5½ years. Children must be aged 5 by 30 June in the year they start Prep.</li> <li>Compulsory schooling starts at 6½ years of age.</li> </ul>

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Jurisdiction	Departments responsible for children's services	Nomenclature for preschool and pre-Year 1	Preschool/School commencement
Western Australia	Dept for Communities [for child care]  Dept of Education and Training [for preschools]	Kindergarten  Pre-primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are eligible for kindergarten in the year they reach the age of 4½ years.</li> <li>• To be eligible for pre-primary, children must turn 5 years old on or before 30 June.</li> <li>• Compulsory schooling starts at the beginning of the year in which a child reaches the age of 6½ years.</li> </ul>
South Australia	Dept of Education and Children's Services	Preschool Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most 4 year olds in SA attend 12 hours of preschool per week.</li> <li>• First year of compulsory schooling is called Reception.</li> <li>• Compulsory schooling starts at 6 years of age; 5 year olds can enrol but it is not compulsory.</li> </ul>
Tasmania	Dept of Education	Kindergarten Prep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten is offered in all government and most non-government schools to children who turned 4 years old on or by 1 January in that year. It is typically offered at 10 hours per week.</li> <li>• Prep is for children who turn 5 years old on or by 1 January in that year and is the first year of primary schooling.</li> <li>• Compulsory schooling starts at 5 years of age, i.e. from Prep.</li> </ul>

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Jurisdiction	Departments responsible for children's services	Nomenclature for preschool and pre-Year 1	Preschool/School commencement
Australian Capital Territory	Dept of Disability, Housing and Community Services [for child care]  Dept of Education and Training (DET) [for preschools]	Preschool Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool is administered by DET and is available to children who turn 4 years old by 30 April in the year.</li> <li>• Preschool services are offered in 3 short days or 2 long day sessions, to a maximum of 12 hours per week.</li> <li>• Kindergarten is the first year of primary schooling and is offered to children who turn 5 years old by 30 April in the given year.</li> <li>• Compulsory schooling starts at 6 years of age.</li> </ul>
Northern Territory	Dept of Health and Community Services [for child care]  Dept of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) [for preschools]	Preschool Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public preschools are administered by DEET.</li> <li>• Independent, private preschools are run by schools associated with the Association of Independent Schools of Northern Territory, the Catholic Education Office or the NT Christian Schools Association.</li> <li>• Preschools offer morning and afternoon sessions for students.</li> <li>• Generally, children start preschool at the start of the term in which they turn 4 years old. In remote localities, children may start preschool when they are 3½. Some non-government preschools also offer programs to children before they turn 4.</li> <li>• Children start Transition at age 5 or soon after. Transition is the first stage of primary school. Children may enter Transition mid-term, depending on their birthdays and the numbers of other children in that age group. Children are in Transition for up to 12 months and move into Year 1 when the school and parents agree they are ready.</li> <li>• Compulsory schooling starts at 6 years of age.</li> </ul>

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Jurisdiction	Departments responsible for children's services	Nomenclature for preschool and pre-Year 1	Preschool/School commencement
			<p>The NT has been trialling a single intake policy in some schools since 2004. In Phase 4 of the trial, which involves 92 schools (representing 76% of NT schools offering Preschool education), children who turn 5 on or by 30 June 2008 may begin in Transition at the beginning of Term 1, 2008; children who turn 4 on or by 30 June 2008 may begin in Preschool at the beginning of Term 1, 2008.</p> <p>For more information please refer to the following websites:  <a href="http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/aoe/index.shtml">http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/aoe/index.shtml</a>  <a href="http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/nsgs/index.shtml">http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/education/nsgs/index.shtml</a></p>

## Appendix 2: Roles and responsibilities in children's services

The following outline of roles and responsibilities in supporting children's services is directly quoted from the *Report on government services (ROGS) 2008*, volume 1, pages 3.3 and 3.4 (SCRGSP 2008). They represent the agreed perspectives on arrangements by all jurisdictions notwithstanding the differences in the provision of services between the various states and territories.

The **Australian Government's** roles and responsibilities for child care include:

- paying Child Care Benefit (CCB) to families using approved child care services or registered carers
- paying Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR) to eligible families using approved child care services
- funding the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) to administer quality assurance systems for child care services
- funding organisations to provide information, support and training to service providers
- providing operational and capital funding to some providers.

**State and Territory government's** roles and responsibilities vary across jurisdictions. Generally, State and Territory governments are responsible for preschool services. Other roles and responsibilities may include:

- licensing and setting standards for children's services providers
- monitoring and resourcing licensed and or funded children's services providers
- providing operational and capital funding to non-government service providers
- delivering some services directly (especially preschool services)
- developing new child care and preschool services
- providing information, support, training and development opportunities for children's services providers
- providing curriculum and policy support and advice, as well as training and development for management and staff
- planning to ensure the appropriate mix of services is available to meet the needs of the community
- providing information and advice to parents and others about operating standards and the availability of services
- providing dispute resolution and complaints management processes.

## Appendix 3: Key stages in the development of the CSNMDS

April 1998	The Children's Services Data Working Group (CSDWG) was established
Late 1998–99	Review of existing children's services data collections
1999	Development of CSNMDS manual, version 1
October 2000	Initial field test of CSNMDS, version 1 (NSW, Qld, Tas, ACT)
2001	AIHW and CSDWG prepared the draft CSNMDS specifications
August 2002	Phase 1 pilot test against the draft CSNMDS specifications
July 2003	National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) noted the Phase 1 pilot test results and endorsed further work
October 2003	Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CDSMAC) noted progress with the CSNMDS and endorsed in principle the further development of the data set
Dec. 2003 to May 2004	AIHW and CSDWG developed the draft CSNMDS specifications, version 2
September 2004	Phase 2 pilot test against the second draft of the CSNMDS specifications (all jurisdictions)
February–June 2005	AIHW and CSDWG developed the final CSNMDS specifications
2 June 2005	CSDWG approved the final CSNMDS specifications
15 July 2005	NCSIMG provisionally approved the CSNMDS final specifications, pending the resolution of minor issues
November 2005	Minor issues with the CSNMDS specifications resolved – specifications approved by NCSIMG
August 2006	CDSMAC indicated a commitment to the ongoing development of the CSNMDS by agreeing to fund a cost-benefit analysis of implementing the CSNMDS
November 2006	A working group was established to work out selection criteria for a contractor to undertake the cost-benefit analysis
January 2007	No suitable tenderer was found for the cost-benefit analysis; Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs advised of the impact of the Child Care Management System
April 2007	A teleconference involving the above working group was held to discuss the future of the CSNMDS. Agreed to put a feasibility study proposal to NCSIMG and CDSMAC for approval
July 2007	Start of the feasibility study

# References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2007. Final report on the development of the Children's Services National Minimum Data Set. Cat. no. CFS 6. Canberra: AIHW.

Data Analysis Australia 2008. National Preschool Census 2007 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and all students (Technical Report) (unpublished).

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services Provision) 2008. Report on government services 2008. Canberra: Productivity Commission.