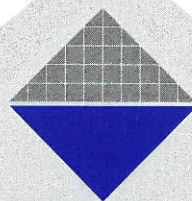


Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections



DEPARTMENT OF
**FAMILY AND
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AIHW

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Comparison of data items in selected children's services collections

**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Canberra**

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Board Chair
Professor Janice Reid

Director
Dr Richard Madden

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

Helen Moyle
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GPO Box 570
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: (02) 6244 1000

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Preface

This information paper compares data items in selected children's services collections in order to inform the development of an agreed national minimum data collection. It is proposed that a minimum data set be established, collected and reported across the industry or field at a national level. This paper recommends that a set of core data items initially be agreed, defined and tested. It is envisaged that the core set would be expanded over time.

The proposals contained in the paper are being considered by the National Children's Services Information Management Group Children's Services Data Working Group as part of the process of developing a national minimum data set.

This paper was prepared by Helen Moyle, Paul Meyer, Anne Broadbent, Priscilla Dowling and Susan Pitt of the Children and Family Services Unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in collaboration with the Child Care Benefits Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (previously the Policy Analysis and Planning Branch, Family and Children's Services Division, Department of Health and Family Services).

Executive summary

Outline of the report

This paper was prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in collaboration with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), in order to inform the work of the Children's Services Data Working Group. One of the responsibilities of this group, which is a subcommittee of the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG), is to improve the data collected on children's services.

The paper explores issues associated with the development of a National Minimum Data Set (MDS) for Children's Services, defined as an agreed core set of data items, definitions, classifications and standards to be collected and reported on across the children's services industry at a national level. As part of the process of developing an MDS for children's services, decisions need to be made about the scope of the data set, the level at which data are to be collected (individual or aggregate), the detailed definitions of service types and the data items and associated definitions. The Children's Services Data Working Group is undertaking further work on the basis of this paper to develop a minimum data set for children's services.

This paper examines in detail four data collections relating to children's services – the FaCS Childcare Program (CP) 1997 Census, the 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Child Care Survey and the 1997 Victorian and South Australian children's services data collections. In addition to these four collections, the paper examines other data collections or definitions where relevant, in order to illustrate other approaches to the issues under discussion. These include the 1998 New South Wales and Queensland children's services data collection, the 1998 children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (administered by the Productivity Commission), the 1996 ABS Census of Population and Housing and the national health and community services data dictionaries published by the AIHW.

The paper is divided into eight chapters.

Chapter 1 of the paper describes the four data collections examined in the paper, in terms of scope, coverage, methodology and timing of each collection.

Chapter 2 presents a discussion of the hierarchy of organisational units in children's services, which is an attempt to present a clear definition of the term 'service' and to standardise the terminology for the various levels of the hierarchies of service provision.

Chapter 3 examines the scope of the various collections, that is, which service providers, children and workers are included in each collection.

Chapter 4 examines the definitions of the various service types and of 'school' (because of the links between children's services and 'school'). The paper examines various definitions of 'formal services' and 'informal care', 'school', 'preschool', 'long day care' (also 'long day care centres' and 'family day care'), 'outside school hours care' (also 'before/after school care' and 'vacation care'), 'occasional care' and other services types, such as 'multifunctional' services.

Chapter 5 covers data items on children and workers that have a population basis— data items that may be compared to a population-based characteristic. These are 'age', 'sex', 'disability status', 'children at risk or abuse and neglect', 'Indigenous status', 'cultural background', 'family type', 'labour force status', 'family income' and 'geographic location'. Approaches used in the ABS Population Census and Surveys and data definitions contained in the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1* are examined for most of these data items.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of data items on other characteristics of children. The items discussed here are 'school attendance', 'use of more than one type of service', 'receipt of fee relief' and 'time spent in care'.

Chapter 7 covers data items on the other characteristics of workers and contains a discussion of the items 'employment status', 'type of work performed', 'hours worked', 'staff qualifications' and 'in-service training'.

The paper concludes with Chapter 8 which contains a discussion of data items on service providers. The data items covered in this chapter are 'availability of service', measured in 'time' (hours, days and weeks of operation), 'number of places' (including classification of places by age of child), data items needed to measure 'utilisation rates' (service use in relation to capacity), 'sponsor' type, type of service delivery setting, linkages with other types of services (preschool and long day care, before/after school and vacation care, and other service types) and fees charged by service providers.

Recommendations

2 Identification of organisational units

The discussion identifies two hierarchies of organisation in children's services, the first of which contains three levels for the *entities* that are involved in the provision of services and the second, two levels for the *services provided*. The paper proposes that the three levels in the first hierarchy be called *sponsor*, *management body* and *service provider/agency* and that the two levels in the second hierarchy be called *service type* and *service component*.

3 Scope of collections

- The paper recommends that a national minimum data set should cover government agencies that provide children's services; agencies funded by government to provide children's services and agencies licensed, but not funded, by government to provide children's services.
- The paper raises questions about the ages of children to be included in the collection, the reference period for counting the children and the inclusion or exclusion of children who were booked into or enrolled in the service but were absent during the reference period.
- In relation to workers, the question of whether 'unpaid workers' should be included as well as 'paid workers' is discussed.
- The issue of whether information should be collected for individuals or in the aggregate is examined both in regard to children and to workers.

4 Definitions: service types and school

Formal services and informal care

Further work needs to be undertaken on developing a definition of 'formal services' and 'informal care'.

School

The ABS definition of primary education, as contained in *Schools Australia* (ABS 1998a) (and not as in the ABS Child Care Survey) should be used as the basis for defining *school* and for determining which programs are 'preschool' and which are part of 'primary school'. School as an 'educational program' needs to be distinguished from 'school' as a 'location'.

Preschool

The definition of preschool, as used by AIHW, could be modified to reflect the different models of providing preschools:

Preschools or kindergartens offer educational and developmental programs to children in the year or two before they begin full-time primary education (6 hours 5 days a week). Preschool services can be provided through a number of models. Traditional 'sessional' preschool services are provided in a dedicated facility and operate during school terms only. Sessional programming involves a distinct group of children meeting for a number of sessions per week (from 2 to 5). These sessions are generally around 2.5-3 hours in length, but may be up to 6 hours in length. Preschool services can operate in schools, either in sessional programming, or during the same hours of operation as the school program. Preschool services can operate in long day care centres. In these circumstances, specific times may be set aside to operate the service, or it may be integrated with the long day care service.

Long day care

It is recommended that 'long day care' be defined as 'care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age which are provided for at least 8 hours a day, on normal working days, at least 48 weeks of the year. Children may use the service either full- or part-time'.

Long day care centres

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

Family day care services

The following definition is recommended: 'care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age which are provided in the home of a caregiver (family day care provider) for at least 8 hours a day, on normal working days, at least 48 weeks of the year. Children may use the service either full- or part-time'. Individual caregivers are part of a network, known as a family day care scheme; caregivers are recruited and supported by a central coordination unit that administers the scheme. It is necessary to maintain the distinction between family day care schemes and recognised home-based care (not in

schemes), and therefore a definition of formal home-based care (as distinct from family day care) should also be developed.

Occasional care services

The following definition is recommended: 'occasional care services generally provide care and developmental activities for children under school age for short periods of time, to assist parents who need care for personal reasons, such as attending adult education classes or medical appointments, going shopping, or simply for respite'.

Outside school hours care services (before/after school care and vacation care)

The term 'outside school hours care services' should be used for both before/after school care and vacation care services, and not limited to just the former. 'Outside school hours care services' would thus be: 'services that offer care and developmental activities for school-age children (mainly of primary school age) out of school hours. The main types of services provided are before school care, after school care, vacation care and care on 'pupil free' days'. 'Before/after school care services' should include 'pupil free days' in the definition. Such a definition might read: 'Services providing care and developmental activities for school-age children (mainly of primary school age) on school days at times (e.g. before school, after school, 'pupil free' days) when school is not in session'. 'Vacation care' can be defined as 'care and developmental activities provided for school-aged children during school vacation periods'.

Other service types

The national minimum data set should include definitions of all recognised service types. These 'other' service types may have components (e.g. long day care) which should be defined according to the agreed MDS definition.

5 Data items: population-based characteristics

Although it is generally recommended that the definitions used in the data dictionary be adopted in the minimum data set, in some instances it is necessary to modify these definitions for the purposes of a children's services data collection.

Age of child

It is recommended that investigations be made to determine the most feasible means of collecting information on the ages of the children using services. If information is collected on an individual child basis (as opposed to aggregated data), it would be possible to obtain the date of birth for each child and to then derive the child's age (in years or months) from that information. If age is recorded directly for each child – rather than date of birth – then clear instructions are necessary, such as specifying a reference date (not a week) and asking for 'age at last birthday'. A decision on the treatment of age of children under 12 months will also need to be made, that is, whether to record age in months or to record their ages as 0.

If data are collected on an aggregated basis, rules for counting children at each age (single year or standard age groupings) must be established and included on the forms. Such rules would need to specify the reference date for determining the age of each child, and then clearly state the boundaries of each age or age group, such as 'Number of children below age 1 year'; 'Number of children age 1 year at last birthday'. It would be difficult to obtain

reliable information on age of children in months by this method. If information is required on numbers of children in long day care services who are of 'preschool age', instructions would need to be provided to assist the respondents in determining this (using child's date of birth and cut-off dates for eligibility for funded preschool enrolment for each jurisdiction).

Age of worker

Several proposals need to be tested in the field to provide an indication of the feasibility and practicality of collecting these data.

- 'date of birth' for workers could be collected because this allows a precise calculation of age if required.
- information on age in age-ranges could be collected, e.g. age in completed years for those less than 20 and in age ranges for other workers. One proposal is: '15', '16', '17', '18', '19', '20-24', '25-34', '35-44', '45-54', '55-64', '65 and over'.
- If testing showed both these options were not feasible then the 'age of worker' could be coded as senior or junior, with senior defined as '18 years or over' and junior defined as 'less than 18 yrs'. This could be modified by the inclusion of one or more additional categories, e.g. '45 and over'.

Sex of child

Sex of children using children's services should be collected as this would allow an investigation of patterns of usage by sex, particularly for older children such as those in outside school hours care services, to aid in determining if such services were meeting the needs of both sexes.

Sex of worker

It would be desirable to collect information on the sex of workers in children's services, particularly given that it is relatively easy to record this information accurately.

Children/parents with a disability

Any developments in children's services data collection should take account of the ICIDH-2 classification in terms of providing an internationally comparable framework for defining disability, and in particular of the three dimensions – impairment; activity and activity limitation; and participation and participation restriction. Work in this area should be deferred until the ICIDH-2 is put into place.

Child referred because at risk of abuse and neglect

Information on children *referred* because they are at risk of abuse and neglect should be collected as part of the information on the numbers of children in 'special needs' groups. The term 'referred' should be included in the question, and, if possible, clarified with wording such as 'referred by a relevant authority because of risk of serious abuse and neglect'.

Indigenous status: child and worker

It is recommended that the definition of 'Indigenous status' be consistent with the ABS standard and the definitions in the health and community services data dictionaries. The information on Indigenous status of child should be sought by service providers directly from the parents of the child.

Cultural background: child and worker

The type of information on 'cultural background' that is required and the purposes to which these data will be put must be decided prior to any decision being made on the variables to be collected. If possible, more than one measure should be collected to facilitate interpretation of results; in deciding on the number of measures, however, respondent burden must be taken into consideration. The ABS standards should be followed, if possible, to enable comparison with national census data. To increase accuracy, data on the cultural background of the child (e.g. country of birth, language or ethnicity) should be sought by service providers directly from the parents of the child, although this would increase the respondent burden.

Family type

For the purposes of the children's services minimum data set, 'family type' could be classified as follows: 1 Couple family with children under 15 years; 2 One parent family with children under 15 years; 9 Not stated/Inadequately described.

Parent's labour force status

It is recommended that the question be titled 'Employment/Study status' with the following options: 1 Employed; 2 Unemployed; 3 Studying/Training for employment and not in categories 1 or 2; 4 Not in the labour force and not in categories 1, 2 or 3. The ABS Child Care Survey definitions of these terms could be attached to the questionnaire.

Family income

Parental income is an important data item and should be collected. Given its sensitive nature, a question such as the ABS 1996 Census question that asks respondents to report family income in ranges would be the preferred method.

Geographic location; service provider and child

It is recommended that the location address of the service provider, with the exception of home-based carers, be recorded and mapped to the ABS Statistical Local Area (SLA) and the Department of Health and Aged Care Access/Remoteness Index of Australia index (ARIA). For home-based carers, the location of their management body address would be coded to SLA. The Children's Services Data Working Group should consider whether the postcode of all service providers should also be collected and computed to the ARIA classification. The feasibility of developing a data item for a children's services data collection on the geographic location of the child's residence would make an interesting research project.

6 Other characteristics of children and families

Child's school attendance

A simple question on school attendance by children in long day care services or in occasional care should be developed to determine the level of use of these services by children in school (as opposed to their use of outside school hours care services). The form of the question could be the same as that used in the CP Census and the ABS survey, although it should be made clear that 'school' refers to an 'educational program' rather than a 'location'.

Child's use of other children's services

If it is decided that this data item should be included in a minimum data set, consideration should be given to whether the information that is sought is; 'use of more than one service', 'use of more than one service where services are provided by different service providers, but at the same location', or 'use of more than one service where services are provided by different service providers at different locations'. This data item should be collected through a parent survey.

Receipt of fee relief

Policy makers, service providers, service users and researchers need to be consulted to determine what type of data on fee subsidies needs to be collected.

Time spent in care/attendance

Jurisdictions should consider whether they require information on time spent in care (time used) or time paid/booked, or both, as these present two different data elements. These measures should be unambiguously defined.

7 Other characteristics of workers

Employment status

A definition of 'employment status' is dependent on decisions about the scope of the collection in relation to child care workers. If 'unpaid workers' are to be included in the data collection, there is a strong case for collecting information on whether workers are 'paid' or 'unpaid'. Information on the status of workers (as either full-time or part-time) could be collected for *paid workers* only. Definitions of 'full-time employee' and 'part-time employee' will need to be developed to take account of workers in outside school hours care services and family day care services.

Type of work performed/job description

Information on the type of work performed, such as collected in the CP Census, is more useful in a minimum data set than information on worker's job title. If the main purpose of the question is to indicate the proportion of workers in direct contact with children, a question and classification similar to that of the CP Census is simple and covers workers in most service types.

Hours worked

In relation to the general question on hours worked, jurisdictions should decide whether they require information on paid and/or unpaid hours; hours actually worked and/or hours usually worked; hours in contact with children and/or non-contact hours. Clear definitions of these concepts should be provided. Further consideration should be given to methods used to obtain data on hours worked by family day care providers.

Qualifications

For consistency purposes, jurisdictions should develop a common list of relevant qualifications for each service type. If information on worker's experience in the child care field is required as well as information on qualifications, questions on qualifications and

experience should be asked separately using a common list of relevant qualifications for each specific service type across jurisdictions.

In-service training

Jurisdictions should determine what information they need about worker's in-service training. In-service training should not be included in a question on 'additional skills' of workers, unless it is possible to distinguish between those skills gained from in-service training and skills gained elsewhere. Classifications of types of in-service training may need to be modified for different service types.

8 Characteristics of service providers

Availability of service (time)

Availability in terms of time needs to be defined to include 'weeks per year', 'days per week' and 'hours per day'. Obtaining this information in a data collection will therefore require more than one question, and will result in the inclusion of three data elements. If the intention is to measure the availability of the service to users, then the phrase '(time) service is provided for children' could be used or a phrase such as 'for children to attend' could be added to the words 'open' or 'operated'. This may be more appropriate for some service types than for others.

Number of places/places by age

The size or capacity of the sector is an important item on which to collect information and the issues of defining 'places' need to be addressed. Consideration should also be given to collecting information on the number of places for children of specific age groups in long day care.

Utilisation/vacancies

The development of data to measure utilisation/capacity needs further consideration by the Children's Services Data Working Group. Issues include the reporting of full-time and part-time vacancies and whether data should be available for each day of the reporting period, or in aggregate.

Sponsorship

If it is not possible to link administrative information on sponsorship to other data, a question on sponsorship should be included in a data collection, using a nationally agreed set of categories for the responses.

Service delivery setting

If this data item is adopted for inclusion, it will be necessary to develop categories of settings specific to each service type.

Linkages with other service types

It is important to collect information on whether 'preschool' is accessible for children using long day care services. The approach taken by the CP of asking long day care centres and

family day care providers if they take children to 'preschool', or (in the case of long day care centres) if a preschool program is provided in-house, is sensible.

Linkages between various types of outside school hours services

In examining the linkages between before/after school care and vacation care services, jurisdictions need to examine what type of information they require, i.e. do they require information about the service provider, the location or both.

Other types of services provided in centres

It is recommended that the following question be included for centre-based service providers: 'Indicate which service types are provided at your centre (please tick all that apply)', with a standardised list of options to include the main forms of children's services: long day care, preschool, family day care, occasional care, before/after school care, vacation care. Definitions of these service types would need to be provided on the questionnaire.

Fees charged

Questions on fees need to be worded so that the information that is obtained is clear and unambiguous. If data were obtained on 'average weekly fee' and 'hours of operation' or 'sessional fee' and 'hours per session', an 'average hourly fee' for most services types could be calculated when the data were processed.

1 Description of project

This paper forms part of a project, undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services (now the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services). The objective of the project is to improve the data collected on children's services (defined as preschool services and child care services for children under school age and children of primary school age). This paper investigates the comparability between the FaCS Childcare Program Census data, data from some other children's services collections, and standard data definitions for particular data items.

The CP collects data through censuses of those child care services it funds throughout Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics collects data on children using child care and preschool services in Australia through its Child Care Survey. In addition, most of the State and Territory Governments collect data on those services that they fund or license and regulate, although there are great variations between the States and Territories in the nature and extent of these collections. Collections from two States, Victoria and South Australia, have been selected for inclusion in this comparative study because those jurisdictions collect information on both preschool and child care and these data are collected by the same government department in each State. The specific collections chosen for inclusion here are for the year 1997, with the exception of the ABS survey and the CP Census of occasional care centres, both of which were last undertaken in 1996.

The types of services included in this study are preschool services, long day care centres, family day care services, before/after school care services, vacation care services, and occasional care services. Preschools are included in the ABS, Victorian and South Australian collections, but not in the Commonwealth CP Census, as FaCS does not fund these services (AIHW 1997a:108). In 1997, Victoria and South Australia provided funding to certain types of child care services (such as TAFE child care centres and 'integrated services centres') independently of the Commonwealth, and thus collected data on these services. (Victoria no longer collects data on services for school age children, since it ceased administering funding for these services with the changes to Commonwealth funding arrangements in 1998.) The various services covered in the data collections are defined in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this report.

CP Census

The CP Census has been conducted annually, but due to the increase in the number of agencies funded under the CP since 1993 it has been necessary to collect data on a selection of service types in any given year. In 1997 the census included long day care services (long day care centres and family day care) and outside hours school care services (before/after school care and vacation care). The 1996 Census of occasional care centres is also included here for comparison with the other collections. All service providers receiving Childcare Assistance for children attending their service are required as a condition of funding to participate in the census. Nearly all long day care centres and family day care schemes are included in the CP, but some before/after school care services and a substantial proportion of vacation care and occasional care services did not receive funding directly from the CP in 1996 and 1997 (Moyle et al. 1997:5-6), and therefore were not included in the census. The

census has three components: information about the service provider; information about each child using the service in the reference week (i.e. children attending the service and children who are booked into the service and for whom the place is paid, but who are absent); and information about each worker (paid and unpaid) in the agency providing the service.

The dates of the relevant data collections were as follows:

- 18–24 August 1997 for long day care centres and family day care;
- 18–22 August 1997 for before/after school care;
- 29 September–3 October 1997 (8–12 September 1997 in Tasmania) for vacation care services;
- 19–23 August 1996 for occasional care services.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey collects information from parents on the use of and demand for child care and preschool, and has been conducted at 3- to 4-year intervals since 1969. The survey is a supplement to the ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey, which is based on a multi-stage area sample of private dwellings and non-private dwellings throughout Australia. In 1996, the Child Care Survey included private households with one or more children under 12 years of age resident in the selected dwelling. The Monthly Labour Force Survey had a sample size of approximately 30,000 private dwellings, representing a sampling fraction of about 0.5% of the population. The sample for the Child Care Survey was about 6,500 households, with about 11,500 child records from these households. Interviews for the 1996 ABS Child Care Survey were conducted over a 2-week period between 11 and 23 March 1996.

Information was collected for each child usually resident in the household, with the respondent being the child's parent, step-parent or guardian. The method of data collection was by face-to-face interview, with questionnaires completed by trained ABS interviewers. Respondents were asked to give information on their use of child care for the week prior to the interview (or during the previous year for vacation care). A number of questions applicable to the family were asked only once for each family and were included on the first questionnaire completed for a child in that family. Some variables included in the data set for the Child Care Survey are taken from information collected in the Labour Force Survey, such as the labour force participation of the parents.

Interviews for the 1999 ABS Child Care Survey were conducted over a 2-week period between 7 and 20 June 1999.

South Australian data collection

The South Australia Department of Education, Training and Employment conducts an annual census of service providers, in a manner similar to the CP Census. All service providers known to the Department are asked to participate in the census. All service types are included each year. For comparability purposes, this study covers the following service types for South Australia: long day care centres, preschools, integrated services centres (centres which operate both preschool and long day care services), TAFE child care centres (child care centres designed specifically to assist parents involved in courses of study at

TAFE colleges), family day care services, before/after school care services, vacation care services, and occasional care services. For the first four of these service types, information is collected about the service itself and about individual children and workers, similar to the CP Census. For the other four service types, information is also collected about the service itself (except for family day care) and about each worker, but information about the children using the service is collected on an aggregated, rather than an individual, basis.

In 1997, the dates for the various collections were similar to the CP Census and were as follows:

- 18–24 August 1997 for child care centres (including integrated services centres and occasional care centres) and family day care;
- 18–22 August for preschools and before/after school care; and
- 29 September–3 October for vacation care.

Victorian data collection

In Victoria, the Department of Human Services collected data in 1997 from all children's services that it funded directly or for which it administered Commonwealth funding. These included preschool services (either preschools or long day care centres that had a funded preschool program), TAFE child care centres, before/after school care services, and occasional care services. The information collected was mainly about the provision of the service, with only aggregated data in most cases on children and workers. As with the CP and South Australian collections, questionnaires were sent to each service provider for completion and return to the Department.

The dates for the collections for the various service types were as follows:

- For preschool services, a census date, 12 February 1997, was used rather than a reference week.
- For TAFE child care centres, the questions referred to the provision of services in Terms 1 and 2 of 1997, and the questionnaires were to be returned to the Department by 18 July 1997.
- The questionnaires for occasional care services were to be returned by 15 August, but no reference period was specified for the information (except 'weekly attendances', which were to be recorded for the period from 5 July 1996 to 27 July 1997).
- Before/after school care and vacation care service providers were asked to return their forms by 17 October; they were asked for information on their service provision in 1997. Before/after school care providers were asked for attendances in Terms 1 to 3 in 1997 (plus for Term 4 in 1996 for services receiving State funding) and vacation care providers for attendances during the four holiday periods in 1997.
- Vacation care service providers were asked to return their forms by 17 October; they were asked for information on their service provision in 1997, and for attendances in the four school holiday periods.

Other data collections

In addition to these four collections, references are made in this paper to other relevant data collections or definitions, in order to illustrate other approaches to the issues under

discussion. These include the children's services data collection forms used in 1998 in New South Wales and Queensland, the 1998 children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (administered by the Productivity Commission), the 1996 Census of Population and Housing (conducted by the ABS), and the National Health and Community Services Data Dictionaries and Classifications (published by AIHW):

A transcript of questions relating to each data item is available upon request to the Child and Family Services Unit, AIHW. E-mail helen.moyle@aihw.gov.au, phone (02) 6244 1188.

Structure of the report

The rest of the paper is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 presents a discussion of the hierarchy of organisational units in children's services, which is an attempt to present a clear definition of the term 'service' and to standardise the terminology for the various levels of the hierarchies of service provision;
- Chapter 3 looks at the issue of what is the *scope* of the various collections— which children, workers, and service providers are included in each collection;
- Chapter 4 examines the definitions of the various service types and of 'school' (because of the links between children's services and 'school');
- Chapter 5 covers data items on children and workers that have a population basis, that is, data items that may be compared to a population-based characteristic, such as age, sex, disability status, Indigenous status, cultural background, family type and family income;
- Chapters 6 and 7 contain discussions of data items on other characteristics of children and workers; and
- Chapter 8 covers the characteristics of service providers.

The discussion of each of the data items, as well as of the populations included (children and workers) in the collections, follows a standard format. The introductory paragraphs examine the reasons for collecting the data item (or for defining the population) and which data collections contain the data item. This is followed by a description of the questions used in the various collections included in the report, a discussion of the issues arising from a comparison of these questions, and a comparison with relevant material from other collections or with other data definitions. Finally, conclusions and suggestions are made concerning further development of the particular data item.

2 Identification of organisational units

2.1 Proposed definitions

Confusion often arises in discussions about children's services over the terms that are used to describe the various entities involved. The same name can be used for two different entities, for instance, the term 'service' is used in many different ways: it is often used for the 'activity' provided (e.g. child care), as well as for the organisation that provides the 'activity' (e.g. the long day care centre). On the other hand, different names may be used for the same entity, for instance, the 'activity' provided may be called a 'service' or a 'program'.

To overcome this, it is necessary to adopt standard terminology to differentiate between the various 'organisational units' in children's services. Two hierarchies of organisation in children's services can be identified. The first of these contains three levels for the *entities* that are involved in the provision of services (*sponsor*, *management body*, and *service provider*), while the second has two levels for the *services provided* (*service type* and *service component*).

It is proposed that the following terms be adopted in the children's service MDS.

The highest level of the first hierarchy is the *sponsor*, either the licensee or the financially accountable person or organisation. The next level is the *management body*, which in many cases may be the same entity as the 'sponsor'. The lowest level of the hierarchy is the *service provider* or *agency*, the entity that has direct contact with the children receiving the services. Again, the service provider may be the same entity as the management body and/or the sponsor. A management body may have responsibility for more than one service provider. These levels are not the same as the 'service delivery setting', which refers to the physical facilities used by the service provider, nor are they the same as the 'service delivery site', which refers to the geographic location of the provider.

The second part of the hierarchy, the *services provided*, has two components. The first of these is *service type*, which is to be used in most cases where the term 'service' has been used to mean the main form of education or care provided for children. Service type can be defined in terms of activities, purpose of service, target population, service operational characteristics and/or service delivery setting. Definitions of the various service types are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Service component is the second part of this hierarchy, and is used to distinguish what might be called 'secondary' activities of service providers, in contrast to their 'core' activities or 'assistance provided'. Again, these components are often referred to as 'services', thus causing confusion with the other uses of that term.

Sponsor

Definition: The entity (person, organisation or enterprise) that is legally responsible for the provision of the service. For licensed services, the sponsor is the licensee.

For funded services, the sponsor is the entity that signs the funding agreement and is accountable for the funds.

Examples: YMCA, Kindergarten Union, local councils, community services organisations, and private-for-profit bodies.

Management body

Definition: The entity (individual, organisation, body or enterprise) that manages the provision of the service.

Example: Management committees.

Service provider

Definition: The entity (individual, agency, organisation, body or enterprise) that provides the service(s).

Examples: Child care centres, preschools, kindergartens, family day care services (coordination unit and family day care providers), occasional care centres, integrated services centres, before/after school care providers, vacation care providers, multifunctional centres, mobile service providers.

Service type

Definition: The education, care and activities provided to children.

Examples: Long day care, preschool, occasional care, vacation care, before school care, after school care.

Service component

Definition: Commodities, activities or facilities supplied by the provider, other than the 'core' service(s).

Examples: Nappy supplies, meals, toy lending library, gymnasium, laundry and dry cleaning.

3 Scope of collections

3.1 Population of service providers included

Introduction

It is important to specify which service providers are to be included, particularly as in most collections (apart from the ABS Child Care Survey) this group is the population upon which a children's services census is based.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Census questionnaires were sent to all service providers who received some form of funding directly from the program, including those approved for Childcare Assistance. It is a condition of such funding that providers participate in data collections upon request from the CP. The providers were asked for information about those services they offered which received some form of funding from the CP. The census did not include any of the services they provided that were not funded by the CP. Providers of neighbourhood model occasional care services, which are funded through block grants to the States and Territories, were surveyed in May 1996, but these services are not in scope of this paper.

South Australia

In South Australia, the Department of Education, Training and Employment in 1997 licensed all child care centres, operated the State-funded preschool services (and funded those operated by church schools), administered family day care, and managed outside school hours care services. It was therefore possible for the Department to send census questionnaires to most, if not all, children's services providers. Participation in the census, however, was not compulsory.

Victoria

In Victoria, the Department of Human Services in 1997 provided or administered funding for preschool services, occasional care services, TAFE child care centres and outside school hours care services, and collected data from the providers of these services. For preschool services, the census questionnaire ('monitoring form') was part of the provider's application for funding for the following year. For the providers of the other services, participation in the census was a condition of their funding agreement with the Department.

Discussion

The 1997 CP Census included most, but not all, long day care centres, since nearly all such centres are approved for Childcare Assistance. The 1997 CP Census probably included all

family day care schemes and providers, since all of these would offer Childcare Assistance. Not all occasional care and outside school hours care service providers, however, were included in the 1997 CP Census, as some of these providers were not in receipt of CP funding at this time. Although the CP requires service providers to respond to the census, a small percentage of non-responses have been reported in each census.

In South Australia, the Department has a mailing list that probably includes all, or nearly all, providers of children's services, funded and non-funded. The Department relies on cooperation from these providers to obtain the data for its collection, and thus has a higher non-response rate than does the CP.

The Department in Victoria asked only funded service providers to participate in the censuses in 1997. It probably had a high response rate, as continued funding appears to be conditional upon such participation. Non-funded services, particularly outside school hours care services, were not included.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services chapter in the *Report on Government Services 1999*, prepared for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, states that the data presented relate to 'services supported by the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. Local government children's services are not included...'. Also excluded are 'informal services whose clients only receive the Childcare Rebate (except some quality of care data – the number of complaints, serious injuries and notifiable outbreaks of disease – that are presented for all State and Territory registered or licensed services)' (SCRCSSP 1999:865).

Conclusion

Obtaining a national data collection through censuses of service providers should involve all providers. The CP administrative database appears to include nearly all long day care centres and all family day care schemes. Due to licensing requirements, the few long day care centres not included in the CP database would be included in the administrative database of each State or Territory. It may be possible to construct a national database for long day care centres by combining the databases from each jurisdiction (CP and each State and Territory) and devising a means of removing duplicate entries.

The situation is somewhat similar for occasional care centres. All occasional care centres are included in State or Territory licensing databases, but only some would be included in the CP database since some occasional care centres are funded by State and Territory Governments without Commonwealth involvement and some are unfunded. Most other occasional care services (but not all) are licensed by State or Territory authorities. Many of these services receive joint Commonwealth/State or Territory funding, which is administered by the State/Territory Government or receive State/Territory funding only. Constructing a database for occasional care services may therefore be a more complex task.

For outside school hours care services, a comprehensive database may not be feasible at present, as only a few jurisdictions license these services. As more of the providers of these services become approved for Childcare Assistance (and for the proposed new Child Care Benefit), however, it is possible that the CP database will include a significantly greater proportion of them than at present.

The scope of the MDS set should be limited to government agencies that provide children's services; agencies funded by governments to provide children's services; and agencies licensed, but not funded, by governments for the provision of children's services.

3.2 Child population included

Introduction

In order to establish a minimum data set for children's services, it is important to establish which children should be included in the collection. The usual approach is to include all children who *attended* the service on a census date or during a reference period. Differences arise regarding the inclusion or exclusion of children who normally attend but were *absent* at the time of the data collection. Another issue may be the need to standardise across collections the age ranges of children to be included.

An important issue associated with this question is the *method* of collecting information about children. Some collections contain records on each *individual* child; for example, information on age, Indigenous status, cultural background, receipt of fee relief is recorded for each child in the collection. Other collections contain *aggregated* information about children, such as the number of children by age groups, Indigenous status and cultural background.

Description of questions used

CP Census

The CP Censuses collected information about each *individual* child. Respondents were asked to 'include all children who *attended*' the service during the census week, and also to include children who were enrolled in the service but *absent* during the census week (e.g. because of illness or holidays) if their fees had been or would be paid. No upper age limit to define the population was mentioned. Family day care providers were not explicitly asked to exclude their own children, but it is unlikely that such children would be included because they would not be 'registered' with the family day care scheme, nor would payment be received for their care.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS survey included *all children aged 0 to 11 years* (below 12 years of age) who were usually resident in the household. Only households in private dwellings were included in the survey. A parent of the child was asked if the child was *cared for* in any of the formal services specified (preschool, long day care centre, family day care, before/after school care, occasional care, other formal care), and/or in informal care in the week (defined as Monday to Sunday) before the interview, or in vacation care in the previous 12 months. The ABS survey also obtained some information on children who did not use formal and/or informal services during the reference week, thus allowing comparisons between the two groups of children.

South Australia

The South Australian census questionnaires for preschools, long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres obtained information on each *individual* child who *attended* during the reference week. No instructions regarding the *age* of the children were given. Respondents were asked to exclude children attending playgroups staffed by parents only, and children who attended the service only because they were accompanying a parent or other person on roster for the service. The questionnaires for the other services collected *aggregated* numbers of children *attending* during the reference week. The questionnaires for before/after school care and vacation care services indicated that these services were specifically for 'school-aged children'.

Victoria

All of the questionnaires used in Victoria collected *aggregated* information on children. There were no explicit instructions about the *age* of the children to be included. The type of aggregated information varied between the services, and was determined by the different funding arrangements.

- Preschool services: the 'total confirmed *enrolments*' as of the census date; this figure is the sum of the number of eligible children 'enrolled and attending a first year of funded preschool' as of the census date, and the number of children 'approved...to attend a second year of funded preschool'.
- TAFE child care centres: the number of *bookings* (full day and half day), for which a payment has been or is expected to be made, for each day (Monday through Friday) of each week of each school term.
- State-model outside school hours care services: 'total *attendances*' for each term (term 4 of 1996 through term 3 of 1997).
- Commonwealth-model outside school hours care services: 'average daily *attendances*' for terms 1, 2 and 3 of 1997.
- Occasional care services: the total number of *attendances* for each week of the financial year.

Discussion

A number of differences between the collections, regarding which children to be included, need to be resolved in order to improve comparability and achieve a national minimum data set.

First, only the ABS survey defined 'children' in terms of age (children in the sample households aged 0-11 years). This problem mainly affects the collections for before/after school care and vacation care services, as some of the children using these are 12 years of age and older.

Second, the term '*attending*' the service was used in different ways and – related to this – there was no consistency on the treatment of children who were *absent*. The CP Censuses included children who *attended* during the census week, defined as children using the service in the census week and children absent during the census week if a payment for them had been or would be made. Other collections also included children who *attended* the service, but this was defined as only those children who actually used the service during the reference period. Several of the collections in Victoria counted *enrolments* or *bookings*, and this would include absent children.

Third, the reference periods for counting the populations included in the census differed for the various collections. Most collections used a 'census week' or 'reference week', with any child attending or enrolled in the service in that period being included in the collection. Different reference periods, however, were used in Victoria: the preschool collection used enrolments on a specified census date (as is the case in most data collections for schools), while other collections used attendances or paid bookings for various time periods.

There are inherent differences between the ABS survey and the other collections that also need to be kept in mind in building a national data collection.

First, the ABS survey obtains information on children using services through a *national sample survey* of households and asks questions addressed to the *parents* of those children; the other collections are based on *censuses* of the *providers* of the services. The statistics produced by the ABS survey are, because they come from a small sample of households, *estimates* of the true values of the variable they are measuring. These estimates have known confidence intervals, which are quite small at the national level for most variables, but which may be too great to produce reliable estimates for sub-populations, such as individual States and Territories or Indigenous children. In 1999, the ABS plans to sub-sample within the household for families with more than two children. 'Basic information collected on children not fully surveyed... will be used to produce reliable estimates, for all children and for all households from these data, using sophisticated sample weighting methods' (ABS pers. comm.). A *census* of service providers, on the other hand, aims to include all providers in the appropriate population and all children using the services of those providers, and thus produces more reliable data than a sample survey (assuming the response rate is 100% or close to it).

Second, because the CP and the State/Territory collections are based on censuses of service providers, it is possible that an individual child is included in more than one collection. For example, a child attending more than one service type (e.g. preschool and long day care) or attending a single service type provided by more than one service provider (e.g. two long day care centres) will be reported by each provider. It also must be remembered that the CP and State/Territory collections overlap to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the service type, and thus some children included in the Commonwealth collection will also be included in the relevant State or Territory collection.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

In specifying descriptions regarding children to be included in calculating performance indicators, the 1998 children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defined 'children' as 'All resident male and female Australians 12 years of age and younger'. All of the descriptions in the manual relating to the total population of children reflect this definition, that is, children are defined as being 12 years of age or younger.

Conclusion

A national data collection would require an agreement on which children should be included. Agreement would therefore need to be reached on the *ages* of the children in the collection, the *reference period* for counting the children, and on the inclusion or not of

children who were *absent* in that period. The issue of which children to include in preschool would need to be addressed when defining 'preschool'.

Although the collections, except the ABS, do not specify an upper *age limit*, analyses of the CP unit record files show that very few children above age 12 are included, most of these being children with a disability using before/after school care (DHFS 1997a). Also, Queensland has funding for before/after school care and vacation care services targeted at 13–15 year olds. If information on the ages of children is also collected (see Section 5.1), it would be possible to include on the collection forms all children using the service, and then to subsequently limit the results and analysis to children below a determined age (probably below 13 years).

The issue of the *type of collection*, one based on *individual* records for each child, or on *aggregated* information, needs to be resolved. Collection of data on an individual basis is likely to be more costly, but would also be more accurate and provide greater scope for analysis. An analysis of the costs and benefits of both types of collections should be made to provide a basis for deciding this important matter.

The ABS survey, by its nature, needs to specify an upper age limit for the children who are to be included in questions to parents about their preschool and/or child care arrangements, and this may require the other collections to do likewise in order to achieve comparability.

3.3 Worker population included

Introduction

It is necessary to determine which workers should be included in the MDS. It is noted that 'caregivers' in family day care schemes are defined as 'paid workers'. In most family day care schemes, the caregivers (or 'family day care providers') are considered to be self-employed and not employees of the scheme, and thus the term 'staff' is usually not applied to these workers.

The CP, South Australian, and Victorian collections all have information about workers in the services covered, but have used different definitions of a 'worker' and different rules regarding which workers to include and exclude. The CP obtained information on individual workers. South Australia obtained information on individual workers, except for 'caregivers' in family day care, for whom only aggregate numbers were collected. The Victorian collection had only aggregated information on workers.

Description of questions

CP Census

All of the CP Censuses had similar instructions regarding which *staff members to include* in the collection: staff members who worked in the reference week; unpaid workers e.g. students on work experience; volunteers/parents; and relief staff who worked in the reference week. Specifically *excluded* from the population of 'workers' were: owner/managers or committee members not working in the centre (or in the outside school hours care service, or family day care coordination unit); staff away for the whole week; SUPS and JET workers; contractors i.e. persons not covered for workers compensation. For

family day care, the CP Census instructed respondents to include each *caregiver* who worked in the reference week.

South Australia

The South Australian censuses had differing instructions about which *staff members* should be included and excluded.

Preschools:

- *include* paid staff members 'regularly in attendance this term'; staff member on leave who would otherwise be 'regularly in attendance this term'; and contract staff who are employed to replace staff members who are on longer term leave, e.g. long service leave or 'accouchement leave'
- *exclude* relief staff/volunteers; occasional care staff from the Children's Services branch of the Department

Long day care centres, integrated services centres, and TAFE child care centres:

- *include* any paid staff who worked in the reference week; paid ancillary staff, e.g. cooks, cleaners, gardeners; and all proprietors and partners who 'work regularly for the service'
- *exclude* volunteers/relief staff/unpaid assistants

Family day care:

- *include* paid family day care staff who worked during the reference week
- *exclude* staff providing 'respite care'
- record the 'number of FDC Care Providers'

Outside school hours care:

- *include* all paid staff who worked during the reference week; any relief staff who worked the full reference week
- *exclude* any staff who were away all of the reference week; volunteers/unpaid assistants

Occasional care:

- *include* all occasional care staff who worked during the reference week; any relief staff who worked the full reference week; volunteers who are part of the staff team
- *exclude* any staff who were away all of the reference week

Victoria

In Victoria, preschool service providers were asked for the 'number of staff that are employed to operate the funded preschool program', with the number to be broken down into two categories: 'teachers' and 'assistants'.

Discussion

There is little consistency between the jurisdictional collections examined here regarding which workers to include and which to exclude. The Victorian preschool collection included all 'employed' staff, regardless of whether or not they were in attendance in the reference period. The CP and South Australian collections specifically excluded staff absent during the reference period. The South Australian censuses had instructions to include 'ancillary staff' such as cleaners and gardeners; such staff would be included in the CP collection only if they were employed directly by the service provider and not by an outside contractor.

The CP Censuses all included relief staff who worked in the reference week, volunteers, and students. This was not the case, however, for all collections in South Australia; for example, in the occasional care and outside school hours care collections, any relief staff who worked during the full reference week were included, but in other services relief staff were specifically excluded.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision has a descriptor for 'total staff', which is defined as 'total labour involved in providing child care and preschool services in the sample week expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTE) staff and number of people employed'.

'Full-time equivalent staff numbers' is defined as the 'total number of hours worked per week by all staff divided by number of hours in standard working week', and consists of:

- full-time equivalent paid primary contact staff
- full-time equivalent paid administrative staff
- full-time equivalent paid employees involved in other tasks
- full-time equivalent carers employed as employees
- full-time equivalent carers employed as contractors

'Number of people employed' is defined as 'total paid employees', consisting of:

- paid primary contact staff
- paid administrative staff
- paid employees involved in other tasks
- total unpaid staff

Conclusion

The definition of 'worker', and thus who is to be included in the collection, requires further discussion. At a minimum, information should be collected on paid staff and family day care providers who work mainly with children, plus administrative staff (particularly in family day care coordination units). Beyond these groups, should students on work experience and parent volunteers be included? Should 'relief staff' be included? Should 'ancillary workers' such as cooks, cleaners and gardeners be included? If so, should they be included only if they are employed directly by the service provider, rather than by a contractor? If there is interest in the total staff resources used to provide a children's service, then consideration should be given to including all types of workers in the collection.

The inclusion or exclusion of certain types of workers, such as parent volunteers and 'ancillary workers', can make a significant difference to the resulting profile of the staff of children's services, particularly when analysing staff qualifications. If information is collected about individual workers, it would be possible to use other data items, such as 'employment status' (see Section 7.1) and 'type of work performed' (see Section 7.2) to select specific sub-populations of workers (e.g. paid employees who work directly with children) for specific analyses.

The exclusion of staff who normally work in the service but are absent during the reference period is defensible on the grounds that it avoids double counting. Undercounting of numbers would occur if staff who are absent the whole week are excluded, and the relief staff who take their place are not included.

4 Definitions: service types and school

4.1 Formal services and informal care

Introduction

A distinction is often made between 'formal children's services' and 'informal child care'. The term 'formal' carries a connotation that the service is provided in some way by or through a 'formal' organisation, as opposed to 'informal' arrangements between individuals. Most of the data collections under consideration obtain information for specific types of *formal* services, because the data are obtained from individual service providers identified as providing specific services. These collections do not, therefore, obtain information on *informal* care. The ABS Child Care Survey, which obtains information from parents, attempts to collect data on all types of services, formal and informal.

Definitions

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey defines 'formal care' as 'regulated care away from the child's home, which includes preschool, before and after school care program, long day care centre, family day care, occasional care, and other formal care'. According to the ABS, 'informal care' is 'non-regulated care, either in the child's home or elsewhere. It includes care by (step) brothers or sisters; care by relatives (including non-custodial parent) and by non-relatives such as friends, neighbours or babysitters. It may be paid or unpaid'.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

In the children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 'formal child care' is defined as 'organised care provided by a person other than the child's parent or guardian, usually outside of the child's home. For example, centre-based long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, vacation care, and occasional care (not including baby-sitting)'. The manual defines 'informal child care' as 'child care arrangements provided privately (for example, by friends, relatives and others including nannies) for which no government assistance is provided other than the Commonwealth's Childcare Rebate. In most States and Territories it is unregulated'.

Discussion

According to the ABS definition, the basic difference between 'formal care' and 'informal care', is that 'formal care' is 'regulated' and 'informal care' is 'non-regulated', but some types

of services which the ABS defines as 'formal' services (e.g. vacation care) are not 'regulated' in every jurisdiction.

The Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision definition of 'formal care', which does not include the concept of regulation, is more useful than the ABS definition, if the term 'organised care' is assumed to mean 'care provided by or through a formal organisation'.

The definition of 'informal care' used in the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision is more in line with administrative arrangements than the ABS definition, but even this definition is problematic, reflecting the complexity of the child care industry. One problem is that despite the examples given, it is not clear what the term 'provided privately' means. Another problem is that while it appears that all care that is provided by a person other than a parent within the child's home is 'informal care', it is not easy to categorise care provided outside the child's home according to the data manual definition. Given that home-based care is licensed and regulated in some jurisdictions and, in Western Australia persons providing home-based child care are provided with support and assistance by officers of the Department of Family and Children's Services, is 'home-based care' categorised as a 'formal service' or as 'informal care'? (The issue of definition 'home-based care' is raised in Section 4.6.)

Conclusion

Developing a definition of 'formal services' (or 'formal care') and 'informal care' in the children's services area is complex. This issue should be referred to the NCSIMG Children's Services Working Group. The definitions of 'formal care'/'informal care' are being considered as part of the process of developing the next version of the *National Community Services Data Dictionary*.

4.2 School

Introduction

One of the reasons for including 'school', or more precisely, 'primary school', in a discussion concerning a minimum data set for children's services is to assist in developing a definition for 'preschool' (see Section 4.3). The concept of 'school' is also used in defining services for 'school age' children, and 'school' may also be the site or location for the delivery of some services. The term 'school' is not explicitly defined in any of the data collections examined here.

Definitions

CP Census

The CP Censuses of long day care centres, family day care, and occasional care services ask, for each child, 'Does this child attend *school*?', with the instruction 'Exclude preschool' on the questionnaire for occasional care services. 'Preschool' is defined in the questionnaires for family day care and long day care centres (albeit in different ways—see Section 4.3), but not

in the occasional care questionnaire. No definition of *school* is provided in any of the questionnaires.

The CP Censuses of outside school hours care services use the term *school* in a number of the questions, such as 'Do you provide before *school* care?', and in the instructions on estimating the number of weeks in a year the service is provided—the number of weeks in public *school* terms and *school* holidays is provided to assist respondents in answering the question. However, no explicit definition of *school*, or of *school age* children, is given.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey had the following question: 'What year or grade is [child's name] currently enrolled in at *school*?' Three options are given for the answer: 'Grade 1/Year 1 or higher'; 'Pre-Year 1'; and 'Other'.

'Pre-Year 1' consists of the following 'grades' in each jurisdiction:

- NSW – Kindergarten
- Vic – Preparatory
- Qld – Preschool/Kindergarten
- SA – Reception
- WA – Pre-primary/preschool
- Tas – Preparatory
- ACT – Kindergarten
- NT – Transition

By implication, *school* is thus defined to include any educational 'program' from 'pre-Year 1' and above.

This definition of *school* differs from the one used in the ABS annual publication *Schools Australia*, where *school* is defined as follows:

A school (other than a special school) must satisfy the following criteria:

- its major activity is the provision of full-time day primary or secondary education or the provision of primary or secondary distance education; and
- it is headed by a principal (or equivalent) responsible for its internal operation; and
- it is possible for students to enrol for a minimum of four continuous weeks, excluding breaks for school vacations.

Primary education is defined as 'full-time education which typically commences at around age 5 and lasts for 7 to 8 years. It does not include sessional education such as preschool education. In New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, primary education may extend from pre-Year 1 to Year 6 (or equivalent). In South Australia and the Northern Territory it may extend from pre-Year 1 to Year 7 (or equivalent). In Queensland and Western Australia it may extend from Year 1 to Year 7 (or equivalent)' (ABS 1998a:94).

South Australia

The term *school* is used in the coding and definition booklets of the South Australian data collections in the following definitions of service types:

Preschool or kindergarten—provision of educational and developmentally appropriate programs for children one year prior to entry into *school*...

Child care—child care for children away from their parents or guardians. This includes regular full-time or part-time care and non regular care, but excludes attendances at sessional preschool, child parent centre, or *school*.

Before/after school care—care provided before and/or after *school* during *school* terms for children who normally attend *school*.

Vacation care—care for *school* aged children during *school* vacation periods.

The before/after school care census in South Australia includes this question:

Number of *schools* from which children come to attend this program.

Victoria

The preschool monitoring form used by Victoria contained the following definitions:

School age care—a child care service for *primary school* aged children operating before *school* hours, after *school* hours, during the *school* vacation and/or for pupil free days.

Child care centre—a centre-based establishment designed primarily to provide a child care service for children *below school age*...

Kindergarten/preschool centre—a centre designed specifically to provide programs for children in the year before they enter *school*.

As with the CP Census, no definition of school or primary school is given in either the South Australian or Victorian collections.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The AIHW defines 'preschool' as the educational and developmental programs, usually sessional, offered for children in the year or two before they begin full-time *school* (Moyle et al. 1996:3-8). By implication, *school* can be defined as a full-time, educational program for children, rather than a sessional program. The AIHW also notes that children in the sessional pre-Year 1 programs in Queensland and Western Australia are closer in age to children in preschool programs in the other jurisdictions. In 1996, the terms 'sessional' and 'full-time' were defined by AIHW as follows:

- 'Sessional' indicates that the same group of children attend three or four sessions per week, each session being about 2.5-3 hours.
- 'Full-time' attendance is about 6 hours per day, 5 days per week.

Discussion

Only the ABS and AIHW provide information on how they use the term *school* as against *preschool*. There is one important difference between these sources, concerning the pre-Year 1 programs in Queensland and Western Australia. The ABS Child Care Survey includes these in the definition of *school*, while the AIHW (and the ABS publication *Schools Australia*) considers them to be 'preschool' (because these programs are sessional) rather than 'school' (where the programs are full-time).

While preschools have traditionally operated for three or four sessions per week, each session being 2.5 to 3 hours in length, in some jurisdictions they are now operating longer sessions, sometimes covering a full school day (approximately 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.).

In New South Wales, the distinction between 'sessional' and 'full-time' is less clear than in other jurisdictions. Some of the Department of School Education preschools operate on a

5 full-days (6 hours) per week basis, and some of the community preschools funded by the Department of Community Services are full-time (with operating hours similar to primary schools) (Moyle et al. 1996:10).

Conclusion

The ABS definition of primary education, as contained in *Schools Australia* (and not as in the ABS Child Care Survey) should be used as the basis for defining *school* and for determining which programs are 'preschool' and which are part of 'primary school'. Pre-Year 1 programs in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory are thus included in primary school; all programs before pre-Year 1 and the pre-Year 1 programs in Queensland and Western Australia are included in preschool. Because Western Australia is moving towards a full-time pre-Year 1 program, this classification will need to be revised in the future.

School as an 'educational program' needs to be distinguished from 'school' as a 'location'.

4.3 Preschool

Introduction

'Preschool' is one of the major forms of 'children's services' in Australia, but the boundaries between 'preschool' and 'school' (or 'primary education') and between 'preschool' and 'long day care' are now less distinct than in the past. As noted above under the discussion of 'school' (Section 4.2), in some jurisdictions 'preschool' programs are operated as part of the 'primary education' system, while other jurisdictions include them in 'children's services'.

In many jurisdictions, there are close links between 'preschools' and 'long day care' services. In the two largest jurisdictions, New South Wales and Victoria, the community services departments license 'preschools' under the same regulations as 'long day care centres', and the department in Victoria provides funding to long day care centres to offer a preschool service to children of the relevant age.

It is therefore important for some agreement to be reached for the development of a national data collection on children's services regarding the definitions of 'preschool' and the distinctions between 'preschool' and other service types, including 'primary school'.

The CP Census had questions for family day care providers and respondents in long day care centres regarding access to or provision of a preschool service. The ABS survey obtained information on the children identified by respondents as attending 'preschool'. Information on 'preschool' as a service type was contained in the South Australian and Victorian data collections. South Australia also obtained information on the preschool component of the services provided by integrated services centres, and Victoria on the funded preschool services in long day care centres.

Definitions: 'preschool' in current data collections

CP Census

The CP Census of long day care centres asked if the service provider offered 'a preschool program run in-house by a qualified early childhood teacher' during the reference week. A

note to this question narrowed the definition of 'early childhood teacher' to 'exclude Diploma qualifications'. A second question asked for the number of children 'taken out to a preschool program at a local preschool'. 'Preschool' as a service type was defined in a table showing for each jurisdiction the name used for preschool, the funding department, and the entry age of children. The table was adapted from one developed by AIHW (Moyle et al. 1996:4-5). A note instructed respondents to exclude in the count those children whose parents took them to preschool outside 'booked hours' of centre care (see Section 6.4).

The CP Census asked family day care providers for the number of children who went to preschool during booked hours of care in the reference week. The questionnaire listed the names of the preschool services in those jurisdictions that used a term other than or in addition to 'preschool'. Respondents were instructed to exclude from the count their own children, and children going to preschool outside 'booked hours' of care.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey asked parents if their children attended a preschool, and defined preschool as 'a type of formal care generally available in school hours during school terms for children from 3 years of age up to the school starting age.'

South Australia

South Australia undertook censuses of preschools and integrated services centres (facilities in which long day care services and preschool services, with possibly other services, operate side by side), and also included questions about the provision of preschool in its censuses of long day care centres and TAFE child care centres. Each of these censuses asked for the types of services provided, and the lists of services in each questionnaire included three types of preschool with associated definitions:

- 'preschool within 12 months entitlement' defined as 'educational and developmentally appropriate programs for children for one year prior to entry into school';
- 'preschool approved early entry/extended': defined as 'educational and developmentally appropriate programs for children who have been approved for early entry or extension of their preschool entitlement';
- 'pre-entry' defined as 'a formally organised educational program for children one term prior to entry into the preschool education program'.

Victoria

Victoria collects information from two types of preschools: State-funded 'sessional' preschools (also known as kindergartens) and preschool programs funded by the State in long day care centres. No explicit definition of 'preschool' is provided in the forms for these censuses, nor in the funding criteria documents, other than the statement that preschool is provided for children in the year before they begin school.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defines 'preschools' as 'Services provided in the year or two before full-time schooling commences. (...)These services are offered during school terms'.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The AIHW defines 'preschool' as 'the variety of educational and developmental programs, usually sessional, offered for children in the year or two before they begin full-time school' (Moyle et al. 1996:3). Preschool can be distinguished from long day care centres in three ways.

- Preschools have 'sessional' programming, defined as a distinct group of children meeting three or four times per week, each 'session' being about half the normal school day in length, 2.5 to 3 hours.
- Most preschools operate only during school terms.
- In most States and Territories, preschools are required to have a qualified early childhood teacher on the staff.

Discussion

Preschool services can be provided in several ways: for instance, in 'sessional' preschools which are located either in primary schools or community facilities, in a centre alongside long day care (integrated services), and as a service component in a centre providing long day care services and other services. Distinguishing between the 'preschool' and 'long day care' may assist in clarifying the use of the term.

Because of the different ways in which preschool is provided and, for 'sessional preschools', the variations (both within and between jurisdictions) in the length of sessions and the number of sessions per week of 'sessional preschools', it will be very difficult to find a definition that will cover all the various types of provision.

In developing a definition of 'preschool' it is important to try to clearly distinguish 'preschool' from 'school' (or 'primary education') and from 'long day care'.

Conclusion

The definition of preschool, as used by AIHW and noted above, could be modified to reflect the different models of providing preschools:

'Preschools or kindergartens offer educational and developmental programs to children in the year or two before they begin full-time primary education (6 hours 5 days a week). Preschool services can be provided through a number of models. Traditional 'sessional' preschool services are provided in a dedicated facility and operate during school terms only. Sessional programming involves a distinct group of children meeting for a number of sessions per week (from 2 to 5). These sessions are generally around 2.5-3 hours in length, but may be up to 6 hours in length. Preschool services can operate in schools, either in sessional programming, or during the same hours of operation as the school program. Preschool services can operate in long day care centres. In these circumstances, specific times may be set aside to operate the service, or it may be integrated with the long day care service.

4.4 Long day care

Introduction

'Long day care' is one of the main forms of children's services, and includes two major service types, long day care centres and family day care. Service providers generally offer long day care as their primary 'activity', and not as a component additional to other types of services provided, such as preschool or occasional care. The opposite may often be the case, however, with some long day care centres offering other services (which they may call 'programs') such as preschool and before/after school care, and family day care schemes often providing occasional care, before/after school care, and vacation care.

The term 'long day care services' is generally understood to refer to child care services that are designed to care for children below school age during traditional working times, that is, on weekdays other than public holidays, from about 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Other forms of centre-based services, such as preschool and occasional care, are not intended to provide a service where a child may attend for a full day, 5 days a week, although some preschools do provide 'sessions' that may be a full school day (from about 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.).

Definitions: 'long day care' in current data collections

CP Census

The CP Census defines 'long day care services' as long day care centres and family day care services (see Section 4.5), which provide care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age and operate for at least 8 hours a day, on normal working days, at least 48 weeks of the year.

South Australia

The South Australian censuses of long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres asked a question about the 'programs or services' offered, for which one possible response was 'long day care'. (Preschools were not asked if they provided 'long day care'.) The associated coding and definition had a list of definitions for each of the service types listed, but for 'long day care' the definition was labelled 'child care'. This was defined as 'care for children away from their parents or guardians', including 'regular full-time or part-time care and non-regular care', but excluding 'attendances at sessional preschool, child parent centre or school'.

Victoria

In Victoria, the preschool monitoring form asked providers what services they offered, in addition to preschool, at the same 'site'. One of the possible service types listed was 'long day care' which was defined as 'a child care service offering full- or part-time care and education for children under 6 which operates 8 or more hours per day, 5 days per week for at least 48 weeks per year'.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defines 'long day care' as a 'service (usually in a centre or family day care

scheme) which provides care for a minimum of 8 hours per day, 5 days per week, 48 weeks per year'.

Discussion

Most of the definitions given above use availability in terms of time (hours per day, days per week, and weeks per year) to define 'long day care', highlighting the fact that a 'long day care service' should meet the needs of parents for care while they are working or studying or training.

The definition used in South Australia is more appropriate for 'child care' per se, rather than 'long day care', as it could also apply to outside school hours care.

Conclusion

It is necessary for a national minimum data set to have a definition of 'long day care' as a service type, with separate definitions for 'long day care centres' and 'family day care' based on the definition of 'long day care'. The definition should be based on time, using the examples cited above, to indicate that care is provided for the whole of normal working days.

Because most long day care service providers in Australia, either now (in the case of long day care centres) or in the near future (in the case of family day care), participate in quality assurance programs and because of the developmental requirements in long day care centre licensing regulations (Moyle et al. 1996), it is appropriate to include in the definition *developmental activities* along with *care* as the service that is offered.

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

4.5 Long day care centres

Introduction

Long day care centres are one form of long day care services, the other being family day care. The CP Census of 'child care centres' covers all long day care centres approved for Childcare Assistance, that is, most of the long day care centres in Australia. While the number of long day care centres not approved for Childcare Assistance is unknown, it is believed to be small. Prior to 1997, the CP used two different questionnaires for long day care centres, one for centres attracting an operational subsidy, the other for centres approved for Childcare Assistance only. In 1997, with the withdrawal of the operational subsidy, only one questionnaire was used.

South Australia conducts an annual census of 'child care' (meaning long day care centres), and also of TAFE child care centres. Victoria also collects information annually from TAFE child care centres. The ABS asks parents about their use of child care during the reference week, with the use of long day care centres being one option among the possible responses.

Definitions: 'long day care centre' in current data collections

CP Census

The 1997 CP Census form did not define 'long day care centres'. The following definition is given in the booklet *Your Guide to Child Care* – 'Long day care centres usually care for 35 to 40 children under school age, in premises especially built or adapted for child care. They provide flexible quality all day or part time care mainly for working families... Generally to be eligible for Commonwealth funding, long day care centres must operate at least 8 hours on every normal working day for 48 or more weeks per year' (FaCS 1998).

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey asked parents about the type of child care they used, and defined a 'long day care centre' as 'regulated, centre-based care which is available to children between birth and school age for the full day. Centres are usually open for most of the year'.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defines 'centre-based long day care' as 'care for children, usually aged 0 to 5 years, in a licensed child care centre which is open for a minimum of 8 hours a day, 5 days per week and 48 weeks per year'.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

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

National Classifications of Community Services, Version 1.0

The *National Classifications of Community Services, Version 1.0* defines centre-based long day care activities as 'provision of care, developmental experiences, recreation, supervision and guidance for under school age children, for periods of up to 12 hours under the supervision of a paid coordinator. Activities classified here are those for which care is mainly work-related, and which are generally provided for use on a regular basis (AIHW 1997b:23).

Discussion

The use of size (in terms of 'places') in the CP definition is questionable, for example, 35 places as a lower bound is not appropriate, as many centres have fewer places.

There appear to be difficulties for parent respondents in the ABS survey in distinguishing between 'preschool' and 'long day care centre', with significant differences in reported numbers of children using long day care centres between the ABS and the CP (see AIHW 1997a:113). These differences are particularly great in New South Wales, where all preschools or long day care centres which have 30 or more places are required, under licensing regulations, to have a qualified early childhood teacher on the staff.

Conclusion

It is recommended that the following definition of 'long day care centres' be adopted, that is, 'facilities which are purpose-built or modified to provide child care in which staff provide care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age. These centres are generally open for at least 8 hours per day, 5 days per week, 48 weeks of the year'.

4.6 Family day care services

Introduction

Family day care is the other major type of long day care. The distinction between the two types is that long day care centres operate in purpose-built (or modified) facilities, while family day care operates within the homes of 'caregivers' (or 'family day care providers'). Some jurisdictions specially license family day care services, but the other jurisdictions have legislation limiting the number of children below school age (other than the provider's own children) that may be cared for in one place at any one time without the need for the facility or provider (a home or otherwise) to be licensed as a child care centre.

Family day care in Australia generally refers to caregivers organised into 'schemes', each being headed by a 'coordination unit' which provides administration for the scheme and support for the caregivers. In some jurisdictions, caregivers who are not part of 'schemes' are regulated by State or Territory legislation and may receive some support from an employee of the community services department of their jurisdiction. The term 'home-based care' is often used for this type of service, to distinguish it from 'family day care'.

The Commonwealth provides operational funding for all family day care schemes, along with Childcare Assistance funding, and thus has undertaken censuses of family day care, with one questionnaire for the coordination unit and another (which asks for information about the children) for the individual care providers. South Australia is the sole 'sponsor' for family day care in that State, and thus collects information annually from each scheme. The ABS Child Care Survey asks parents if they used family day care for their children in the reference week.

Definitions: 'family day care' in current data collections

CP Census

The definition used in the CP Census for a 'family day care scheme' is 'a network of individuals (caregivers) who provide care and activities in their own homes for other people's young children'. (As with long day care centres, this definition is provided in the census report, rather than in the questionnaires.)

ABS Child Care Survey

As part of the ABS Child Care Survey definitions of the various types of care that children can use, family day care is defined as 'a type of formal care offered in private homes by registered carers, available for a full day to children of all ages'.

South Australia

The question in the South Australian censuses of long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, preschool services and integrated services centres about the 'programs or services' offered had 'family day care' as one possible response. This was defined as 'home-based child care provided by selected and approved care providers in their own homes. Care is provided on a full-time, part-time, temporary or occasional basis and includes overnight and emergency care'.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defines 'family day care' as 'long day care provided for children in the carer's own home. Largely aimed at children aged 0 to 5 years, but primary school aged children may also receive care before and after school. A network of carers is organised and supported by a central coordination unit'.

Australian Institute of Health Welfare

The AIHW defines 'family day care schemes' as 'networks of individuals providing care and developmental activities in their own homes for children 0-12 years. Family day care providers are recruited and supported by a central coordination unit, which administers the scheme' (AIHW 1997a:98).

Discussion

Some of the definitions quoted above are for 'family day care' per se, while others are for 'family day care schemes'. The latter include elements of the coordination unit and its role in recruiting and supporting the providers and administering the scheme. Since this element (and associated Commonwealth funding) is the means to distinguish between 'family day care' and other 'home-based care', it is important to include it in a definition of family day care.

The definitions used in the ABS survey and in South Australia do not sufficiently differentiate between 'family day care' and 'home-based care'.

Conclusion

'Family day care' can be defined as care and developmental activities primarily for children under school age which are provided in the home of a caregiver (family day care provider) for at least 8 hours a day, on normal working days, at least 48 weeks of the year. Children may use the service either full- or part-time. Individual caregivers are part of a network, known as a family day care scheme; caregivers are recruited and supported by a central coordination unit that administers the scheme.

It is necessary to maintain the distinction between family day care schemes and recognised home-based care (not in schemes), and therefore a definition of formal home-based care (as distinct from family day care) should also be developed.

4.7 Occasional care services

Introduction

Occasional care, as the name implies, is intended to be used on a non-regular basis. Because it can be provided in a great variety of ways, it is quite complex with mixed forms of funding, provision and regulation. For example, the Commonwealth funds occasional care services under two broad models, 'occasional care centres' and 'occasional care neighbourhood model services'. Some States and Territories participate with the Commonwealth in funding these types of services, and some also fund other types of occasional care independently of the Commonwealth (Moyle et al. 1996:73-74).

An important characteristic of occasional care is that it is not designed to be 'work related', that is, its primary purpose is to assist parents who need care for their children for reasons other than working.

All of the data collections under consideration obtain information from or about occasional care providers, although not all providers may be included in the collections.

Definitions: 'occasional care' in current data collections

CP Census

The 1996 CP Census discussed here covered Commonwealth-funded occasional care *centres*. The census reports define an 'occasional care service' as one that 'provides care mainly for under school-age children. These services cater for the needs of families who require short term care for their children'.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Survey lists 'occasional care centre' as one of the possible forms of care that parents may have used for their children in the reference week. It defines this as 'Regulated care, which is generally available to children between birth and school age for short periods of time to allow parents to shop, attend appointments, or to take brief breaks from parenting'.

South Australia

In South Australia, most of the censuses ask about 'other programs or services' provided, with 'occasional and emergency care' as one of the response options. The definitions of this term, however, differ between the various questionnaires.

- The questionnaire for 'occasional care centres' defines 'occasional care' as 'Care for children away from their parents or guardians on a part-time or non-regular basis in a specific occasional care centre'.
- A similar definition is given in the coding and definitions booklet for preschool services: 'Care for children away from their parents or guardians on a part-time and/or non-regular basis that is not covered by preschool, pre-entry or a before/after school care service'.
- A shorter definition is provided in the coding and definition booklets for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres: 'Care for children on an irregular basis, within normal operating times of a centre'.

Victoria

In Victoria, the monitoring forms for preschool and preschool (long day care) also ask about other services provided, including 'occasional care'. The definition given in the first of these forms is rather complex, in order to exclude and include certain 'programs':

Child care for children under 6 which is not a 3year-old or funded preschool program and which operates for less than 8 hours per day. For example, funded or non-funded occasional care, lunchtime care before or after the preschool program, Kindercare.

The definition used in the second form (preschool in long day care) is much briefer:

A short term child care service for children under 6, including funded or non-funded occasional care.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defines 'occasional care' as 'Care provided on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods of time or at irregular intervals'.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The AIHW definition is as follows: 'Occasional care services generally provide care for children under school age for short periods of time, to assist parents who need care for personal reasons, such as attending adult education classes or medical appointments, going shopping, or simply for respite'.

Occasional Care Association NSW

The main representative group for occasional care, the Occasional Care Association of New South Wales, has raised a number of issues with regard to use and misuse of the term 'occasional care'. An article by this group (Occasional Care Association NSW 1997:3-4) gave the following definition:

Occasional child care is provided at a licensed centre on an hourly or sessional basis for parents who need care to attend appointments, to organise personal matters, to undertake casual and part-time work, to provide temporary respite from full-time parenting and to provide developmental opportunities for children. Occasional care is a service that can reliably be used at short notice by parents for varying amounts of time. Occasional care is available to meet family needs around child care which are not met by other services. It is available to members of the community. Centres are licensed under the same standards which apply to long day care centres.

The article then argued that use of the term 'occasional care' by other services was incorrect:

The use of this terminology to describe other forms of care is incorrect where it doesn't meet the criteria of availability, short notice, variable hours of use and accessibility to all families within the community. Using the term occasional care to describe the kind of additional care that some services may provide to their current users in order to fill casual vacancies is not true occasional care.

Discussion

Some of the definitions cited above are quite specific for the jurisdictions in which they apply, and would not be appropriate elsewhere. Also, some elements of these definitions are incorrect. For example, use of the term 'regulated' in the ABS definition would apply to most, but not all, occasional care services, and the limitation of occasional care only to

'centres', as in two of the South Australian definitions, overlooks the provision of occasional care in other settings.

Conclusion

A more general definition of 'occasional care' should contain the following elements: care is provided on a non-regular basis; care is usually for short periods of time; most children using this form of care are under school age; and care is provided mainly to assist parents for other than work-related reasons. Because the licensing regulations for occasional care services often contain specifications about the developmental nature of the programs to be provided (Moyle et al. 1996), as in the case for long day care services, it is appropriate to include *developmental activities* along with *care* in the definition of the service that is offered.

It should be recognised that occasional care may be offered by providers of other children's services, such as preschools, long day care centres, and family day care. However, the objections raised by the representative group, as cited above, could possibly be addressed, perhaps by developing terminology specific for each type of occasional care. This may not, however, be feasible.

The following definition is recommended: 'occasional care services generally provide care and developmental activities for children under school age for short periods of time, to assist parents who need care for personal reasons, such as attending adult education classes or medical appointments, going shopping, or simply for respite'.

4.8 Outside school hours care services (before/after school care and vacation care)

Introduction

There are several types of services specifically for children of school age (mostly primary school age): services for children before and after school (referred to here as 'before/after school care') and services for children during school vacations ('vacation care'). Some of these services also operate on school days when teachers are not available for teaching ('pupil free days'). Because these services have some common elements, they are referred to collectively as 'outside school hours care services'.

Definitions

CP Census

The CP (in the report of the 1995 Census) defines 'outside school hours care' as a service that 'provides care for school aged children before and/or after school during the school term. These services usually make use of established facilities such as schools, community halls, and recreation centres'. While 'pupil free days' are not included in the definition of 'outside school hours care', the CP Census forms instruct respondents to include days/hours of attendance on pupil free days under the category of 'after school care'. Vacation care is defined in the 1995 CP Census report as 'care for school aged children during the school holidays' (DHFS 1997b).

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey asked parents if their children had been cared for in a 'before or after school care program' during the reference week. This was defined as 'A type of formal care available to school-aged children before and/or after school hours'. Parents were also asked if, during the previous 12 months, their children had attended any 'vacation care program during school holidays'. No definition of 'vacation care program' was provided.

South Australia

One possible response to the question in the South Australian censuses of long day care centres and before/after school care services, about the 'programs or services' offered was 'out of school hours care'. This was defined as 'Care provided before and/or after school during school terms for children who normally attend school. This care may be provided by child care centres, preschool centres, family day care schemes or specific out of school hours programs, similar to vacation care programs'. The censuses of integrated services centres, TAFE child care centres, and preschool services also contained a question about the 'programs or services' provided with one response being 'before and after school hours care' (defined as for 'out of school hours care').

Another response to the question in the censuses of long day care centres, integrated services centres, TAFE child care centres, and preschool services, on 'programs or services' provided, was 'vacation care'. This was defined as 'Care for school aged children during school vacation periods. This care may be provided by child care centres or family day care schemes but is often provided by specific programs which operate for the duration of the relevant vacation period'. The definition for 'vacation care' given in the census of vacation care services included only the first sentence of the above definition: 'Care for school-aged children during school vacation periods'.

Victoria

The Victorian questionnaire for Commonwealth model before/after school care services defined the 'school age child care service components' as 'before school, after school and vacation care'. The questionnaires for before/after school care services asked about 'pupil free days' as well as before and after school care.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defined 'outside school hours care' as 'Care provided for school aged children (5 to 12 years) during term time and vacation care which refers to care during school holidays'. The manual went on to say that 'Related terms are before and after school hours care which refer to care during term time only'. 'Vacation care' is defined as 'Services that provide care for school age children over vacation periods only'.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The AIHW defines the term 'outside school hours care services' as 'care and activities provided to children of primary school age out of school hours. The term includes before school care services, after school care services, vacation care services and care services on pupil free days' (Moyle et al. 1997:1).

Discussion

In some data collections this term 'outside school hours care' is used to refer to all services provided specifically for school age children and in other collections it refers to before and after school care only. Similarly, some data collections include 'pupil free days' as part of 'before/after school care services', whereas others do not.

Conclusion

The term 'outside school hours care services' should be used for both before/after school care and vacation care services, and not limited to just the former.

Since quality assurance programs are being developed for outside school hours care services, it is appropriate to include *developmental activities* along with *care* in the definition of services for school age children.

A definition of 'outside school hours care services' would thus be: 'services that offer care and developmental activities for school-age children (mainly of primary school age) out of school hours. The main types of services provided are before school care, after school care, vacation care and care on 'pupil free' days'.

'Before/after school care services' should include 'pupil free days' in the definition. Such a definition might read: Services providing care and developmental activities for school-age children (mainly of primary school age) on school days at times (e.g. before school, after school, 'pupil free' days) when school is not in session.

'Vacation care' can be defined as 'Care and developmental activities provided for school-aged children during school vacation periods'.

4.9 Other service types

Introduction

A number of other types of children's services, not included in those discussed above, can be identified. The Commonwealth provides funding for a number of these: multifunctional children's services, multifunctional Aboriginal children's services, mobiles and toy libraries, and Aboriginal play groups. Some States and Territories also either license or provide funding for other types of services. For example, 'integrated services centres' is a type of service included in the census program in South Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory licenses a number of 'other service types', including 'adjunct care' and 'holiday camps' (Moyle et al. 1996).

Terms used for other service types in current data collections

CP Census

The Censuses have included the other service types mentioned above. Most of these services are located in rural and remote areas, including Aboriginal communities. The following definitions of three of these services are based on those given in the report of the 1995 Census (DHFS 1997b):

Multifunctional children's services offer a range of child care services from a single centre, for children 0-12 years in rural and remote areas.

Multifunctional Aboriginal children's services are designed to help Aboriginal communities with their child care needs; they can include different types of child care depending on community needs.

Mobile children's services are mobile resource units carrying children's services to families in rural and remote areas; services include playgroup sessions, child care, activities for older children, toy and book library services, and support and advice for parents.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey asked parents of children below school age about the type of care they used for their children during the reference week, with a list of possible responses on a prompt card. The service types listed included 'other formal care' which was defined as follows:

This includes any other non home-based formal care whose primary function is the care of children for short periods of time. It also includes adjunct care. An example is facilities available at a fitness centre to care for the child while the parent participates in the centre's activities.

South Australia

South Australia conducts censuses of 'integrated services centres'. The annual Children's Services reports from South Australia have described these as centres in which long day care services (funded by the Commonwealth) and preschool services (funded by the State Government) operate side by side, with other services possibly being offered as well.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision includes in 'other care' the following service types: multifunctional services, multifunctional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services, mobiles and toy libraries.

Discussion

Some of the service types listed here are 'unique', such as multifunctional Aboriginal children's services (which provide some types of child care services and also some other types of family support services) and mobile and toy library services. Others appear to be centres at which a variety of children's services only are provided, such as multifunctional services centres and integrated services centres. 'Other formal care', as defined in the ABS survey, appears to be similar to occasional care, and the example used, 'adjunct care', is a service type that is licensed in the Australian Capital Territory.

Conclusion

The national minimum data set should contain definitions of all recognised service types. These 'other' service types may have components (e.g. long day care) which should be defined according to the agreed MDS definition.

5 Data items: population-based characteristics

5.1 Age of child

Introduction

Age is widely recognised as an important data element for analysing service use and for making comparisons with demographic statistics. In children's services, there are other compelling grounds for collecting information on the ages of the children, such as to monitor compliance with regulations specific to age groups of children, and to assess the availability of services for specific age groups. For such purposes, it may also be necessary to obtain the ages of children below 1 year of age, in months.

There are two approaches to collecting data on ages of service users. Health data collections usually obtain the client's 'date of birth', and then use this information to derive the client's age. In community services data collections, however, age in years is often obtained directly, rather than derived from date of birth (AIHW 1998a:3.14).

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses asked for each child's age in years as of a specified date (18 August 1997), except for vacation care services, in which the age of the child in the reference week (which could vary, according to the jurisdiction) was to be recorded. In services that catered for children below school age, an instruction was given regarding children less than 12 months of age, whose age was to be recorded as 0.

ABS Child Care Survey

In the ABS Child Care Survey, the age of each child at the time of interview was recorded in years or, if the child was less than 1 year old, in months.

South Australia

The South Australian collections had various ways of collecting child's age.

- Preschools, long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres – age in years at last birthday (but no instructions given about children less than 1 year of age, nor about a reference date).
- Family day care – no question on age.
- Before/after school care and vacation care services – aggregated information on numbers of children in specified age groups (under 6, 6–8, 9–11, 12 and over).

- Occasional care services—aggregated information on numbers of children at specified ages (less than 1, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and over).

Victoria

The Victorian collection also had varying ways of collecting child's age.

- Preschool (including long day care centres offering a funded preschool program)—information on age was asked only about 'Koorie' children, with respondents asked to indicate the number of 'Koorie' children attending the program as at the reference date (7 February 1997) who were 3, 4, or 5 years old.
- TAFE child care centres—estimated percentages of children attending who were under 3 years and who were 3 years and over.
- Occasional care and outside school hours care services—no information on age.

Discussion

Information on the ages of children using children's services is included in most, but not all, of the collections, and in all cases is collected by a question on age in years, rather than by date of birth. For some services, the information is only at the aggregated level (numbers of children by age groups). For those services that collect information on the age of each individual child, there is no common reference date: the age is usually recorded as of the date of the census or survey, but these dates vary between collections. Also, where the information on ages of children is aggregated and grouped, there is no consistency in the age groups used.

Other data collections/definitions

ABS and *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0*

The ABS collects information on age in most of its censuses and surveys, and uses the following definition: 'The age of the person in (completed) years'. This definition is also used in the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* (AIHW 1998a:3.14).

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The 1998 data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision specified a number of descriptors using the ages of the children:

- total children 12 years and younger by age group (0-1, 2-3, 4, 5, 6-12);
- total children in the year immediately prior to commencing full-time school (the exact age depending on the jurisdiction);
- children (12 years and younger) with working parents, by age group (0-4, 5-12); and
- children using government funded and/or provided formal child care services by age group (0-1, 2-4, 5-12).

Conclusion

Investigations should be made to determine the most feasible means of collecting information on the ages of the children using services. If information is collected on an

individual child basis (as opposed to aggregated data), it would be possible to obtain the date of birth for each child and to then derive the child's age (in years or months) from that information. The *National Community Services Data Dictionary* recommends this approach: 'Wherever possible and wherever appropriate in a community services context, date of birth should be used rather than age because the actual date of birth usually allows more precise calculation of age' (AIHW 1998a:3.12).

If age is recorded directly for each child, rather than date of birth, then clear instructions are necessary, such as specifying a reference date (not a week) and asking for 'age at last birthday'. If the ages of children under 1 year are to be recorded in months, the form will need to be designed carefully to avoid confusion between the age in months for these children and the age in years for the others. If the decision is made to not record ages in months for children who have not reached their first birthday, then instructions will be necessary to ensure their ages are recorded as 0 and not 1.

The two approaches will need to be investigated to determine which is the most feasible method of collecting information on age. Several issues will need to be considered.

- Respondent burden of the different methods. Whether obtaining 'date of birth' is more of a burden to the respondent than 'age at last birthday' will depend on the type of information kept by service providers.
- Accuracy of the information. Whether information on 'date of birth' is more accurate than 'age last birthday' will also depend on the accuracy of service providers' records and the form in which this information is stored.
- Privacy and confidentiality. While the *National Community Services Data Dictionary* notes that 'date of birth can also be used as an aid to uniquely identify a client if other identifying information is missing or in question' (AIHW 1998a:3.12), this has implications for privacy and confidentiality.
- Comparability with other community service collections. One advantage of using date of birth is that the child's age could be determined not only at the time of collection, but at other times as well, thus overcoming problems of comparability with other community service data collections.

If data are collected on an aggregated basis, rules for counting children at each age (single year or standard age groupings) must be established and included on the forms. Such rules would need to specify the reference date for determining the age of each child, and then clearly state the boundaries of each age or age group, such as 'Number of children below age 1 year'; 'Number of children age 1 year at last birthday'. It would be difficult to obtain reliable information on age of children in months by this method. If information is required on numbers of children in long day care services who are of 'preschool age', instructions would need to be provided to assist the respondents in determining this (using child's date of birth and cut-off dates for eligibility for funded preschool enrolment for each jurisdiction).

5.2 Age of worker

Introduction

Information on the age of workers is routinely collected in most industries to facilitate planning, particularly the future demand for workers. For children's services, some information on the age of the workers may also be required to monitor compliance with

standards, which for some service types and in some jurisdictions may specify what proportion of the staff may be under a specified age, usually 18 years. Such information is collected in the CP Censuses of all service types, with the exception of family day care providers. South Australia collects more detailed information on the age of the workers in all service types covered here, while Victoria does not collect information on age of workers.

Description of questions

CP Census

In the CP Censuses of long day care centres, outside school hours care services and occasional care centres, respondents were asked to indicate the 'age group' for each worker, with two categories for response: 'senior 18 yrs or over' and 'junior less than 18 yrs'.

South Australia

Respondents in the censuses in South Australia were also asked for information on the age of the workers included in their questionnaires, with 10-year age groups used for the responses for those aged 20 years and over (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59 and 60 and over). For workers below age 20 years, single years were used. For long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, preschool services, integrated services centres and family day care, the lowest age category was 'under 15', while for outside school hours care and occasional care services, the lowest category was 'under 18'.

Discussion

Age of staff is currently included in only two data collections, but the type of information in these two collections is quite different. The CP Censuses provide information on staff ages according to two age groups ('junior' and 'senior'), while the collection in South Australia has information on staff ages by broad age groups.

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

The ABS collects information on age in most of its censuses and surveys, and uses the following definition: 'The age of the person in (completed) years'. This definition is also used in the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* (AIHW 1998a:3.14).

Conclusion

The following proposals need to be tested in the field to provide an indication of the feasibility and practicality of collecting these data:

- As with the ages of children (Section 5.1), 'date of birth' for workers could be collected rather than 'age' because the actual date of birth allows a precise calculation of age if required.
- Alternatively, if for workforce planning purposes information in age ranges is required, a coding frame that would take account of the CP age and the South Australian age

would be workable, for example, age in completed years for those less than 20 and in age ranges for other workers. One proposal is: '15', '16', '17', '18', '19', '20-24', '25-34', '35-44', '45-54', '55-64', '65 and over'.

- If testing showed both these options were not feasible then the 'age of worker' could be coded as senior or junior, with senior defined as '18 years or over' and junior defined as 'less than 18 yrs'. This could be modified by the inclusion of one or more additional categories, e.g. '45 and over'.

5.3 Sex of child

Introduction

Information on the sex of the children using services is necessary for examining patterns of service use by sex. It is usually assumed that there are no differences between boys and girls in the overall use of services, but this may not be the case for some service types, such as outside school hours care, and for some population sub-groups, such as children from a non-English speaking background. At present, sex of child is collected only in the ABS survey, and in some of the South Australian and Victorian questionnaires.

Description of questions

ABS, South Australia and Victoria

The ABS survey had a question on 'sex of child', as did the South Australian questionnaires for preschools, long day care centres, TAFE child care centres and integrated services centres. The only information on the sex of children using services in Victoria is for 'Koorie' children attending funded preschool services, as this information was required for reporting to the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Discussion

The only information at a national level on the sex of children using children's services is collected in the ABS survey. The South Australian data from those services for which this information is collected are comparable with the ABS data.

Other data collections/definitions

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

As with age, 'sex' is a core data element in the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0*, where it is defined as 'The biological sex of the person'. The dictionary notes that 'The data element sex is required for analysis of service utilisation and need for services' (AIHW 1998a:3.11).

Conclusion

It would appear desirable to collect information on the sex of children using children's services, particularly given that it is relatively easy to accurately record this information. This would allow an investigation of patterns of usage by sex, particularly for older children such as those in outside school hours care services, to aid in determining if such services were meeting the needs of both sexes.

5.4 Sex of worker

Introduction

Most analyses of the composition of the labour force include 'sex' as a key variable, particularly to monitor equal opportunity provisions of national and state legislation. Employment in children's services has been dominated by women, but there is growing interest in addressing this imbalance (Powderly & Westerdale 1998:9). Data on the sex of workers are collected in all the South Australian censuses covered here; no information on this topic is collected in the CP Census or in the Victorian data collection.

Description of questions

South Australia

The South Australian questionnaires ask for information on the sex of each worker, to be classified as either 'Male = M' or 'Female = F'.

Other data collections/definitions

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

As noted in the previous data element, 'sex' is a core data element in the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0*, and is defined as 'The biological sex of the person' (AIHW 1998a:3.11). According to this data dictionary, the ABS advises that the correct terminology for the data element is 'sex', which refers to biological differences between males and females, rather than 'gender', which refers to socially expected or perceived dimensions of behaviour associated with males and females.

ABS Census of Population and Housing

Some information on sex of workers is available from the tabulations of the ABS Census of Population, conducted every 5 years. These figures for 1996 (reported in Powderly & Westerdale 1998:9) indicate that 2% of 'pre-primary school teachers', 9% of 'child care coordinators' and 3% of 'child care workers' were males. While this information provides some indication of the overall proportions of males and females in children's services occupations, the ABS Census data do not allow for analyses by service type.

Conclusion

As with 'sex of child' (Section 5.3), it would appear desirable to collect information on the sex of workers in children's services, particularly given that it is relatively easy to record this information accurately.

5.5 Children/parents with a disability

Introduction

The term 'disability' is currently defined in varying ways to meet the differing requirements of people with a disability and the numerous service providers. The complexity of this area is clearly illustrated in a recent AIHW report entitled 'The definition of disability in Australia: moving towards national consistency' (Madden & Hogan 1997). The AIHW established a Disability Data Reference and Advisory Group in March 1996 to assist and promote the development of consistent definitions of disability.

The move to greater consistency of disability data is recognised as being of major importance both nationally and internationally. Such improvement is essential to enable better estimation of the need for, use of, and outcomes from services (including children's services) for people with a disability. The 1990s have seen a number of recommendations and developments in relation to the need for consistent and comparable data in the disability area (Madden & Hogan 1997:4-7).

Some efforts have been made to provide assistance to children with disabilities using children's services, for example, the CP and States and Territories fund programs to assist children with a disability to participate in children's services (Moyle et al. 1996, 1997).

The collection of useful data on children with a disability in children's services is not simply a matter of developing a clear definition of the term. There are a number of different components to be considered when determining which data to collect on 'children with a disability':

- the type of disability or impairment (e.g. physical, intellectual, blind, deaf);
- the extent to which the disability limits activities and the level of assistance required to undertake activities;
- the extent of, and barriers to, participation of the child in life situations;
- the support needed by the child to enable him or her to carry out an activity or to participate in life situations.

(The first three components correspond to the ICIDH-2 dimensions of 'impairment', 'activity limitation', and 'participation' – see below.) It is vital that the question 'what do we need to know about children with a disability' be asked prior to any decisions on definitions or on questions to be used to collect information on 'disability'.

Description of questions used

Each of the collections examined here included questions related to the disability status of the children using the services, and some also included one or more questions on the disability status of the parents of all children using the service. In some of the collections,

information was obtained on special services provided for children with disabilities, including whether the workers had any special training in this area.

CP Census

In the children's details sections of the CP questionnaires, there was a question on the 'special/additional needs groups/cultural background' of each child, and respondents were asked to tick all appropriate boxes. The possible responses included:

- child with diagnosed disability including intellectual, sensory, physical or developmental delay
- parent(s) with continuing disability

The questionnaires also had several questions on the SUPS program, including one on the type of assistance provided and which additional needs groups were assisted, including 'children with a disability'.

In the staff details section, the questionnaires (except vacation care) also included a question on in-service training undertaken within the previous 12 months. One of the possible responses was 'training for special/additional needs children which included 'disability'.

In the questionnaires for long day care services, under the 'parent activity' section, one of the options was 'one parent disabled and not working, the other parent work related.'

ABS Child Care Survey

In the ABS survey, no direct question on children with a disability was included, but related questions were asked in the section on demand for child care:

- What was the main reason you did not want to use any (more) of these services for (name of child) in the last 4 weeks?
- What was the main reason this service wasn't available ?
- What was the main reason you did not use (more of) this service?

One of the possible responses to each of these was 'child has special needs (illness/disability)'.

South Australia

In South Australia, the questionnaires for preschools, integrated services centres, long day care centres and TAFE child care centres asked respondents to record each child's 'special need'. A definition of 'children with special needs' was provided for preschools and integrated service centres: 'Refers to children with developmental needs which arise from an identified disability or condition, gift or delay or risk of delay in their development. These needs may be identified by parent(s), field staff, care providers, or specialist staff from the [Children's Services] District Office, other agencies, institutions or private practice'. This was followed by an explanation of the 'nature of special need': 'The nature of the child's special need(s) may relate to any one or a combination of the following developmental areas: sensory, physical, speech and language, intellectual, emotional, behaviour or social. The needs may also relate to a specific medical condition, syndrome or disability'. An identical list of codes for 'special needs' was provided for all of these service types. The list of 14 items included a number of disabilities along with a range of other characteristics such as gifted; geographically isolated; having a health condition.

Respondents in occasional care and outside school hours care services were asked for the number of children attending the program in each of the 14 categories (same definitions) plus a category for 'other'. The definitions given for 'children with special needs' and 'nature of special need' were the same as used for preschools and integrated services centres.

The questionnaires for long day care, TAFE and integrated services centres also included a question for each child on 'reason for attendance', with a box for one response per child with the possible responses including 'child disability' and 'parent disability'. The questionnaires for outside school hours care services asked for the number of children attending according to reason for attendance, with 'child disability' and 'parent disability' included among the categories.

The family day care questionnaire asked respondents for: the 'number of children with special needs on D-SUPS' (with no definition of D-SUPS provided); the 'number of children with special needs who attended during reference week for FDC [family day care] services only in each of the following special categories' (same 14 categories and definitions as above, plus 'other'); and 'total number of children with special needs'.

Most of the South Australian questionnaires also included a question on the 'additional skills' of staff. This was defined as 'A significant skill, knowledge or understanding that a staff member may possess in addition to his/her qualifications, e.g. ...experience in working with children with special needs, e.g. physical disability...' Possible responses included 'sign language', 'special needs skills', and 'integration of children with disabilities'. Up to two codes could be recorded.

Victoria

In some of the questionnaires used in Victoria, the respondents were asked for the percentage of children with disabilities. Respondents in TAFE child care centres were asked: 'Of the individual children who attend the TAFE child care service estimate the percentage who: Have an intellectual disability (%); Have a permanent or long term physical disability (%);...' A note provided some clarification: 'Children who have an intellectual disability and/or a permanent long term physical disability may or may not have an aide.'

The questionnaires for outside school hours care had two questions related to disability. The first was 'reasons for use', which asked for the estimated percentage of individual children who used the service for the following reasons: 'Children or parents have a continuing disability or incapacity'; '...a single parent...'; '...children at risk of serious abuse or neglect'; 'parents at home ...'; 'other' (the total of all categories should equal 100%). The second question was 'profile of users', which was similar to the question used for TAFE child care centres.

Discussion

It is not obvious what the purpose is for collecting data on the disability status of children using children's services, or of parents whose children used the services. It is not surprising then that the four data collections examined above have considerable differences regarding the definition of 'disability' and the questions they use for this data item:

- In the CP and South Australian collections, 'disability' information is collected as part of a question on 'special needs' or 'additional needs'.
- The ABS survey, the South Australian collection for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres, and the Victorian collection for outside

school hours care obtained information on 'reasons for using the service', with possible responses that included having a disability (or a parent with a disability).

- The CP collection and the South Australian collection for family day care obtained information on the numbers of children for whom 'supplementary services' are provided, including special assistance for children with a 'disability'.
- The CP and South Australian collections also collected information on workers with special training or skills, including working with children with a 'disability'.

Where definitions of 'children with a disability' are provided in the above collections, many are unclear or circular (e.g. 'Hearing impairment – refers to the child who has been identified as having hearing impairment'). This highlights the difficulty and complexity of defining the concept of 'disability'. The collections vary as to whether they are collecting information on impairment, activity limitation, participation restriction or support provided.

Other data collections/definitions

CP SUPS guidelines

The CP SUPS funding guidelines defined children with a disability as 'children with a physical, sensory, neurological, intellectual or learning impairment or a child undergoing continuing medical/psychological assessment for such disabilities' (DHFS 1996a).

New South Wales

The New South Wales questionnaire in 1998 included a question on the number of children with a disability (defined as 'children who have a developmental delay or disability') and then asked the respondent to classify them as high, medium or low support need.

The questionnaire also asked whether the centre provided access opportunities for children in the local community with a disability, and how the needs of the children with a disability were met.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision has the following definition for 'disability related care': 'includes children who have a developmental delay or disability including intellectual, sensory, or physical impairment or parent(s) with a disability'.

International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps

The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) 1980, published by the World Health Organization (WHO), provided a conceptual framework for disability which is described in three dimensions (Madden & Hogan 1997:14):

- Impairment – any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function.
- Disability – any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.
- Handicap – a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal for that individual (depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors).

In the new version of the ICIDH (ICIDH-2) now being drafted by the WHO, new concepts of impairment, activity (limitation) and participation (restriction) are proposed. The 'Activity and Activity limitation' is proposed to replace the 'disability' dimension, with the definition of 'Activity' being 'the nature and extent of functioning at the level of the person. Activities may be limited in nature, duration and quality'. The 'Handicap' dimension is proposed to replace 'Participation and Participation Restriction', with the definition of 'Participation' being 'the nature and extent of a person's involvement in life situations in relation to impairments, activities, health conditions and contextual factors' (Madden & Hogan 1997:18-21).

ABS Surveys and Census

The ABS conducted a Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers in 1998. The previous collection was conducted in 1993 (ABS 1993a). The survey used a series of detailed questions to identify the type of impairment (a range of health conditions that have lasted for 6 months or more), the degree of impairment, whether the impairment restricted everyday activities, and the condition that caused the disability. For the purposes of this survey, 'disability' was defined as 'the presence of one or more of 15 limitations, restrictions or impairments that had lasted, or were likely to last, for a period of 6 months or more'. Persons aged less than 5 years with one or more disabilities are all regarded as having a handicap (i.e. a limitation in performing certain tasks associated with daily living), but are not classified by areas or severity of handicap. The survey also asked a number of detailed questions, including questions on mobility, self care, communication and aids/assistance needed (not all were asked of all age groups).

Some early ABS Censuses of Population and Housing contained questions relating to disabilities – respondents were asked to indicate whether they were deaf, dumb or blind. A more general question was included in the 1976 Census, but the quality of the data obtained was poor and no results were released. While testing was undertaken in 1993 in an attempt to develop suitable disability questions for inclusion in the 1996 Census, no effective question design was found in time and no questions on disability were included. The ABS view is that a question on disability should be included in the 2001 Census, but only if the testing program produces questions which provide high quality data (ABS 1998b:81).

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

The *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* contains two relevant 'data element concepts': 'disability – activity limitation' and 'handicap – participation restriction', which use the current ICIDH definitions. The definitions will be reviewed in the future, taking into account work by the AIHW and the new ICIDH-2 (AIHW 1998a:3.53-3.54, 3.75-3.76).

Conclusion

A first step in developing data elements related to 'disability' is to determine what is important to know about children with a disability in child care (or children of parent(s) with a disability). For example, to what extent is it important to know the exact type of impairment? Is it preferable to know the needs of children with disabilities (or the needs of children with parents who have disabilities) so that appropriate services can be provided? Or is the aim to determine participation rates? (It should be noted that estimates of the number of people with a disability in the population are based on ABS surveys which have definitions of 'disability' that may differ from the definitions used in the children's services

data collections.). How much information is required on the parent's disability, and how is it determined if this creates a special need for the child? Are the types of extra services available to children with a disability of interest (e.g. wheelchair access, teachers with extra skills such as sign language)?

There are a number of different components that should be considered when determining what data to collect on 'children with a disability': the type of disability or impairment (e.g. physical, intellectual, blind, deaf); the extent to which the disability limits activities and the level of assistance required to undertake activities; the extent of, and barriers to, participation of the child in life situations; and support needs of the child. It must be determined which of these are important for children's services data collections.

Given the importance of the ICIDH-2 classification in terms of providing an internationally comparable framework for defining disability, any developments in children's services data collection should take account of this classification and in particular of the three dimensions – impairment; activity and activity limitation; and participation and participation restriction. Work in this area should be deferred until the ICIDH-2 is put into place.

5.6 Child referred because at risk of abuse and neglect

Introduction

'Children at risk of serious abuse and neglect' is one of several groups accorded priority of access to CP-funded child care. Some States and Territories also provide funding to child care services for family support reasons, including support to families where children are at risk of abuse and neglect. It is therefore important to collect information on the use of children's services by these children.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses for all service types collected information on the 'special groups/cultural background' of each child, with one category being 'referred because child at risk of serious abuse or neglect'.

ABS Child Care Survey

There was no question in the ABS Child Care Survey on this topic; such a question would be inappropriate in that survey, because the questions are asked of parents rather than service providers.

South Australia

The South Australian censuses collected information in two ways. The censuses of long day care centres, integrated services centres and TAFE child care centres asked for each child 'reason for attendance', one possible response being 'at risk/referral'. These three censuses, along with the census for preschools, also had a question for each child on 'special need', with one category being 'special family needs', defined as '...significant special family needs

which will impact on the child's development, e.g. poverty, family crisis, abuse'. The questionnaires for outside school hours care services asked for the 'number of children attending over reference week whose main reason for attending the program was...', with one of the options being 'at risk/referral'.

Victoria

In Victoria, the questionnaires for outside school hours care services asked for an estimate of the percentage of children using the service for each of four priority of access groups, one of which was 'children are at risk of serious abuse or neglect'.

Discussion

In the collections under review, information on children at risk of abuse and neglect was collected in two ways, either as a 'reason for attendance' or as a member of a 'special needs' group. In several of the collections in South Australia, both approaches were used. The two approaches are not strictly the same, as 'reason for attendance' may be much broader than 'special needs', which may be limited to specified groups such as those accorded priority of access or with recognised disadvantages.

Another issue is the way in which 'reasons for attendance' or 'special needs' were counted. In some collections, children may have been included in more than one category, while in others only one category was allowed. If only one category per child is allowed, under-counting of the children with the various reasons for attendance or in each special needs group will occur. This problem is probably greater in collections that have aggregated information on children rather than on individual children. For example, if the question is 'What proportion of the children using your service have this special need?', respondents are likely to provide estimates for each category which total to 100%.

A third issue is the use of the terms 'referred' or 'referral': some collections used this term, as in 'child referred because at risk of abuse or neglect', while others had 'child at risk of abuse or neglect', and others had 'at risk/referral'. Inclusion of the term 'referred' (or 'referral') has the effect of narrowing the category, as it implies that some authority has formally referred the child to the children's service provider. When the term is not used, it is unclear who has determined that the child is at risk of abuse or neglect – the respondent or another authority. Categories such as 'at risk/referral' are also vague: 'at risk' could be interpreted as 'at risk' of a number of things and 'referral' could be for any number of reasons. Thus more specific category names are required.

Finally, the terms 'referred' or 'referral' were not defined in any of the collections nor was the term 'at risk'. Normally 'referred' would mean a formal referral from the State or Territory authority responsible for the protection of children, but other forms of referral are also possible, and the same can be said for the term 'at risk'.

Other data collections/definitions

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

The *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* has a data element 'Child abuse and neglect', with the definition as follows: 'When a child is subject to physical, sexual or emotional actions or in actions which have resulted in, or are likely to result in, significant harm or injury to a child.' (AIHW 1998a:3.83). The dictionary also notes that there are some

variations across States and Territories in interpreting this term. This is because there is no one clearly understood and agreed definition of abuse and neglect, even among the eight State and Territory community services departments responsible for child protection in Australia. 'Abuse and neglect' is to a certain extent a subjective term, the interpretation of which is determined by community expectations and norms, cultural norms, individual values and State legislation, policy and practice.

State and Territory Community Services Departments

State and Territory Community Services Departments are responsible for receiving and dealing with notifications of child abuse and neglect and would largely be responsible for referral of children to other agencies (including child care services). As the definition of abuse and neglect is so subjective, it is important that the focus of the survey questions be on those children '*referred*' by the relevant agencies because of risk of serious abuse and neglect', not on those 'at risk of abuse and neglect'. Categorising a child as 'at risk of abuse and neglect' is reliant on the judgement of the respondent, who may or may not have the relevant information to enable them to make an accurate assessment.

Conclusion

Information on children *referred* because they are at risk of abuse and neglect should be collected as part of the information on the numbers of children in 'special needs' groups (rather than as part of the numbers of children by 'reason for using service'), children should be counted in each relevant category of special needs, not in just one category.

The term '*referred*' should be included in the question, and, if possible, clarified with wording such as '*referred* by a relevant authority because of risk of serious abuse and neglect'. Additional clarifying information on the relevant authorities in each jurisdiction may be included if there is space available on the questionnaire.

5.7 Child's Indigenous status

Introduction

Indigenous status of child was sought in the CP, South Australian and Victorian collections, but not in the ABS Child Care Survey. The question format varied across the collections and also, in some cases, within each collection (depending on the type of service provided).

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses included a question on the Indigenous status of the child as part of the identification of 'Special Groups/Cultural Background'. Respondents were asked to tick the appropriate box if the child was from an 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background'. This information was sought on individual children in the questionnaires for long day care centres, family day care (caregivers form), outside school hours care and occasional care.

South Australia

In the South Australian censuses, Indigenous status of each individual child was collected in the censuses of long day care centres ('Indicate Y if child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander') and also in the censuses of integrated services centres, preschools and TAFE child care centres ('Indicate Y if child is Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander'). For family day care and before/after school care services, information was only sought at the aggregate level ('Number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children registered with your scheme in the reference week'). All of the South Australian censuses included a definition for 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander': 'Assessment based on information from parent(s) or primary care giver to staff of centre responsible for completing forms'.

Victoria

The forms used in Victoria included questions on 'Koorie' children. On the TAFE questionnaire, this was asked as part of the question identifying the proportion of children from special needs groups: 'Of the individual children who attend the TAFE child care service, estimate the percentage who are Koorie'. Similarly respondents in before/after school care were asked for the 'Estimated percentage of individual children who are Koorie' and respondents in occasional care services were asked to 'Estimate the number of Koorie children attending the occasional child care service'. The questionnaires for preschool service providers had two questions relating to the number of Indigenous children: '(a) Total number of Koorie children attending the preschool program as an eligible or non-eligible preschool child' and '(b) Total number of Koorie children who are eligible preschool children'.

Discussion

The following issues relate not only to how the questions regarding Indigenous status are asked, but also to who provides the data.

- The method of identification of Indigenous status by the data provider will impact greatly on the quality of the data. For example, is a question about Indigenous status asked of the parents when they enrol their child, or is Indigenous status assumed from appearance or other indicators? If the latter, then the quality of the data will be poor.
- The questions used include many variations. Some refer to 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background', others to 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' or 'Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander', and others to 'Koorie'. Are these terms all the same and are they interpreted in the same way by people filling out the forms?
- The term 'Koorie' in the Victorian collection is not defined, and so could be interpreted differently according to who is filling out the form. Does it include Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders? Is data on children of Koorie 'origin' sought, or on children 'identifying' or whose parents 'identify' as Koorie?
- A related problem is the interpretation of non-responses or blanks where information on the Indigenous status of a child is not provided or coded. There are often large numbers of 'unknowns' or blanks because of the difficulty of determining Indigenous status in the absence of a direct question to the person involved. If the only response option provided is 'Yes', it cannot be assumed that when the 'Yes' box is not ticked then the answer is 'No' – the answer may well be 'don't know' or 'missing'.

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics and *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0*

According to the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0*, a decision regarding the definition of Indigenous status was made by the High Court of Australia in *Commonwealth v. Tasmania* (1983) 46 ALR 625, as follows: 'A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community'. This does not include South Sea Islander people (AIHW 1998a:3.18).

The ABS has done considerable work on the development of standard question modules regarding Indigenous status based on this definition. As it is not possible to collect the three components to this definition (descent, self-classification, and community acceptance) from a single question, the ABS has focused on 'descent'. The aim is to measure an individual's self-assessed historical and cultural affiliation. There are two standard questions that are most relevant to the child care surveys (Barnes et al. 1997):

22 (iv) Respondent not present and someone else transcribes response from administrative data (e.g. school collections, hospital records)

Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

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

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

22 (v) Person is an infant

Is the baby's mother of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

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

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

And

Is the baby's father of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

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

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

To avoid problems with coding of non-response and blanks, the information system should not allow for the recording of 'unknowns' and should not allow for the field to be by-passed.

Apparently the ABS standard is under review for the 2001 Census, but there are unlikely to be any changes. Consistency with this standard will facilitate comparison of data from children's services collections with ABS Population Census and other ABS data.

This standard has been used as the basis for definition of the 'Indigenous status' element in the Health and Community Services Data Dictionaries, with the following data codes:

1. Indigenous – Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander origin; 2. Indigenous – Torres Strait Islander but not Aboriginal origin; 3. Indigenous – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

origin; 4. Not Indigenous – not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin; 9. Not stated (not for use in primary collections)

Conclusion

To be consistent with the ABS standard and the definitions in the Health and Community Services Data Dictionaries, it is recommended that the following question be used for collecting information on Indigenous status of child:

Is the child of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

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

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

To be consistent with the coding in Health and Community Services Data Dictionaries, it is recommended that the following codeset be used for Indigenous status: 1 Indigenous – Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander origin; 2 Indigenous – Torres Strait Islander but not Aboriginal origin; 3 Indigenous – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin; 4 Not Indigenous – not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin; 9 Not stated. Categories 1, 2, and 3 could then be combined to give one category, 'Indigenous'. Category 9 should not be used except when transcribing information from another data source and the required information is not available from that source.

To increase the accuracy of the data it is recommended that the question of Indigenous status of the child be sought by service providers directly from the parents of the child, although this would add to the respondent burden for service providers. One possible approach to this is the inclusion of a question on Indigenous status in a 'parent survey' form, similar to that used by New South Wales. Parents are requested to fill out this form and return it to the service provider. Information on the form remains anonymous, as no parent/child identifiers are collected. This approach would ease the respondent burden for the service provider, but would not enable these data to be linked with other information for individual children.

The definition of 'Indigenous status of child' should be consistent with that for 'Indigenous status of worker' (see Section 5.8) in the children's services collections.

5.8 Worker's Indigenous status

Introduction

Indigenous status of worker is sought in the CP, South Australian and Victorian data collections. The question format varies across these collections and also, in some cases, within each one, depending on the service type.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses included a question on the Indigenous status of the individual worker as part of the identification of 'Cultural Background'. Service providers were asked to classify workers as either '1 Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background; 2 Culturally diverse background; 3 None of the above'. This information was sought on individual workers in long day care centres, family day care schemes, outside school hours care services, and occasional care centres.

Victoria

The Victorian preschool monitoring form included a question regarding the reason why 'Total Teaching Time' may be different from 'Total Assistant Teaching Time'. Reasons included 'Koorie Preschool Assistant' as one of the possible responses (the response was to be a tick, not to indicate the number of staff). Information on the Indigenous status of workers was not sought for other service types.

South Australia

Indigenous status of individual workers was collected in the South Australian censuses of integrated services centres, preschools, family day care and occasional care services. Respondents were asked to 'Indicate Y if staff member is Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander'. This information was not collected for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres or outside school hours care services.

Discussion

The following issues relate not only to how the questions regarding Indigenous status are asked, but also to who provides the data.

- The method of identification of Indigenous status by the data provider will impact greatly on the quality of the data. For example, is the question asked of staff or is it assumed from appearance etc?
- The CP questionnaire mixes the issues of identification and origin, i.e. 'identify' and 'background' in the one question.
- There are similar problems as for the question on the Indigenous status of children – the variations in the question (e.g. 'Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' or 'Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander'), the lack of definition of the term 'Koori' and the interpretation of non-responses or blanks.

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics and *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0*

See Section 5.7 'Child's Indigenous status'.

Conclusion

In the children's services collections, the definition of 'Indigenous status of worker' should be consistent with that for 'Indigenous status of child' (see Section 5.7).

To be consistent with the ABS standard and the definitions in the Health and Community Services Data Dictionaries, it is recommended that the following question be used for collecting information on Indigenous status of worker:

Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?

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

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

The same codeset as for 'Child's Indigenous Status' is recommended.

To increase the accuracy of the data, it is recommended that the question of Indigenous status of the worker be sought by service providers directly from that worker.

5.9 Child's cultural background

Introduction

Information on 'cultural background' is contained in many children's services data collections. One reason for collecting this information is to identify children who may have difficulty in speaking English and therefore require additional assistance. Another is to determine the utilisation rates for different cultural groups for the purposes of targeting promotional material.

There are many ways, however, to classify the cultural background of a child, for example, birthplace of child, birthplace of mother/father, year of arrival in Australia, main language spoken at home, proficiency in English, a language other than English spoken at home in addition to English, first language spoken, language of greatest competence, ethnicity, ancestry, citizenship status and religion. It is important to be clear on the purpose of the data that is to be collected to determine which is the most appropriate measure or measures of 'cultural background' to include in questionnaires.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses (for all service types) included a question on the cultural background of each child. The question was asked as part of the Special Groups/Cultural Background question with one of the options for respondents being '5 = Child with a culturally diverse background including those with a parent born overseas in a country where the first language is not English'. Respondents were asked to tick any appropriate box (that is they could also report that a child was of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background).

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey included questions on country of birth and year of arrival of mother and father, main language spoken at home and whether another language was spoken. The child questionnaire itself included questions on country of birth of child and year of arrival of child. It also asked if any language other than English was spoken in the household and the main language spoken in the household.

Victoria

The Victorian monitoring forms included a variety of ways of asking about children's cultural background. The term used was 'Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB)' defined as children who were born in a non-English-speaking country or were born in Australia with one or both parents who were born in a non-English-speaking country.

The questionnaires for preschool services asked for the number of children from families with a non-English-speaking background; number of non-English-speaking background children who only speak a little English or do not speak English; number of children for whom the primary language spoken in the home is not English; and the number of children for whom the primary language spoken in the home is: Arabic, Chinese, ..., Other.

The questionnaire for TAFE child care centres asked respondents to estimate the percentage of children who 'are from a non-English-speaking background'.

Outside school hours care services providers were also asked for the estimated percentage of children who 'are from a non-English-speaking background (NESB)'. In addition there were questions on the primary language, other than English, spoken in the home for the majority of this 'NESB' group and the estimated percentage of all 'NESB' children who only spoke a little English or did not speak any English.

Similarly, questions on the primary language other than English spoken in the home for the majority of the 'NESB' group and also the estimated percentage of all 'NESB' children who only spoke a little English or did not speak any English was asked in the occasional care questionnaires.

South Australia

In the South Australian censuses for long day care centres, integrated services centres, TAFE child care centres and preschools, respondents were asked to indicate the child's birthplace and if the child had arrived in Australia in the last 5 years. The same questions were also asked for the child's female and male guardians. A question was also included on the main language, other than English, spoken at home.

The forms for occasional care and outside school hours care asked for the number of children attending over the reference week from homes where 'language other than English' was spoken, with 'language other than English' defined as 'a language other than English that is spoken in a child's home even though English may be the first language spoken'.

Discussion

- The quality of the information will be questionable unless specifically asked of parents, since information from service providers may be based on assumptions or guesses. Information obtained on an aggregate level (for example, the percentage of children who

are from a non-English-speaking background) will be most susceptible to guesswork on the part of respondents and therefore the least reliable.

- The questionnaires discussed above include a range of measures of cultural background including country of birth, year of arrival, the percentage of children from a non-English-speaking background, proficiency in English, and other language spoken at home. There is no consistency across the four collections and some inconsistency within collections.
- Many of the above questions are confusing and the terms are not clearly defined. For example, the CP Census asked respondents to identify children from culturally diverse backgrounds without providing any clear definition of that term.
- In the ABS questionnaires, the language choice provided does not necessarily match country of birth (for example, language includes Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic as choices, but none of these are reflected in the country of birth codes).
- Birthplace of child/parent does not necessarily correspond to proficiency in English. For example, people born in Asia may be of European descent and have English as their first language.

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics

The ABS has traditionally used two main methods to identify and measure cultural background—country of origin and language. Country of origin combined with arrival time in Australia may be useful for examining use of services by migrants and the monitoring of programs or policies related to migrants. Language is a different issue. Many migrants have English as a first language, or are at least proficient in its usage. On the other hand some people who were born in Australia have little English proficiency. People with English as a second language often face disadvantage in terms of education and in accessing services (ABS 1998b:26-33).

The 1996 Population Census included several questions related to cultural background: country of birth; person's year of arrival in Australia; birthplace of each person's mother and father; languages spoken at home; and a question asking 'how well each person speaks English'.

The ABS proposes to include a question on *ancestry* in the 2001 Census of Population and Housing. A question on *ancestry* was last included in the census in 1986. This question asked 'What is this person's ancestry?' (for example, Greek, English, Indian, Armenian, Aboriginal, Chinese etc.). The intent was to gain information on the respondent's origin rather than a subjective perception of their ethnic background. Evaluation of the 1986 Census results found that ancestry data did not add to data already obtained on language and birthplace for many cultural groups. However, it did provide some additional information on some cultural groups, members of which are born in many countries (e.g. people of Chinese or Indian ancestry) or distinct groupings within a country (e.g. Maoris). The negative side was that many respondents did not clearly understand what was meant by 'ancestry' and a high proportion of people either did not respond or simply responded with 'Australian'. A question using concepts similar to those used in 1986, but with some self-coded response categories including 'Australian', was included in a census test conducted in May 1997. Further testing will be undertaken on this topic with the aim of developing an effective question design for the 2001 Census. The ABS considers that the question on ancestry alone

is a poor indicator of ethnic or cultural origin. However, when *ancestry* is cross-classified with *birthplace of parents* and *language spoken at home*, the results provide a clear indication of ethnic or cultural origin (ABS pers. comm.).

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0 and National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0

The *National Community Services Data Dictionary Version, 1.0* includes several items as indicators of cultural background: 'country of birth'; 'first language spoken' (defined as 'the language the person identifies, or remembers, as being the first language that they could understand to the extent of being able to conduct a conversation'); 'main language spoken at home' (defined as the main language spoken by a person in his/her home [or most recent private residential setting occupied by the person] on a regular basis to communicate with other residents of the home or setting and regular visitors); 'interpreter services required'; and 'year of arrival in Australia' (AIHW 1998a). The data item 'country of birth' uses the Australian Standard Classification of Countries for Social Statistics and the data items 'first language spoken' and 'main language spoken at home' the Australian Standard Classification of Languages. The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0* includes only one item to indicate cultural background – 'country of birth'.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

An AIHW paper on *Non-English-Speaking Background and Indigenous Status: Identification in National Health and Welfare Data Collections*, notes that people of Non-English-speaking background have been defined in the Australian Public Service as 'Persons who have migrated to Australia and whose first language is a language other than English, and children of such persons' (AIHW 1996:2-3).

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision defines children from a non-English-speaking background as 'children living in situations where the main language spoken at home is not English'.

Conclusion

- Before any decisions are made on the variables to be collected, decisions must be made on what information on 'cultural background' is required and the purposes to which this data will be put. This may clarify, for example, whether what is required is information on language or on participation of children from particular ethnic groups. Is it important to know that the child speaks another language at home (and therefore that he or she comes from a different ethnic background) or is it important to know that English was not his or her first language? Is it more important to know whether the parents are from a different country or that they do not have English as their first language?
- Probably more than one measure should be collected to facilitate interpretation of results. In deciding on the number of measures, however, respondent burden should be borne in mind.
- Whatever measures are decided on, the ABS standards should be followed if possible, to enable comparisons with census data. This is particularly important if looking at participation rates of different groups.

- To increase the accuracy of the data, the question of the cultural background of the child (country of birth, language, or ethnicity) should be sought by service providers directly from the parents of the child, although this would increase the respondent burden. As with Indigenous status, one option is to include a question or questions on cultural background on a 'parent survey' form similar to that used by New South Wales. While this approach would ease the respondent burden for the service provider, it would not enable data on cultural background to be linked with other information for individual children.
- The measures used should be consistent, where possible, with those used for worker's cultural background (Section 5.10).

5.10 Worker's cultural background

Introduction

Information on the cultural background of workers may be required to analyse the employment participation rates of particular ethnic groups in the child care industry, or to identify staff who may have difficulty in speaking English and therefore require additional training. As noted in the section on 'child's cultural background', there are many ways to classify 'cultural background' and it is important to be clear on the purpose of the data to be collected in order to determine the most appropriate measure or measures to include in questionnaires.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses (all service types) included a question on the cultural background of child care workers. For all service types, except occasional care, the options were: '1 Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background; 2 Culturally diverse background, i.e. staff born overseas in a country where the first language is not English; 3 None of the above'. Only one box was to be ticked. For occasional care services (1996), the wording was slightly different, with option 2 being 'Ethnic background, i.e. first language other than English'.

None of the other collections included a question on the cultural background of the worker.

Discussion

The question in the CP Censuses attempted to combine both country of birth and language in the one question and is somewhat confusing. It is not clear whether the question is seeking to identify staff born in a country that does not have English as its prime language, or staff who do not have English as a first language.

It is not clear whether service providers obtained the reported information on cultural background directly from the workers or responded on the basis of their observations and impressions. If the latter, then the quality of the data will be questionable.

Other data collections/definitions

The two main methods used by the ABS to identify and measure cultural background (country of origin and language), along with relevant definitions used in the *National Community Services Data Dictionary* and the *National Health Data Dictionary*, are discussed in Section 5.9 'Child's cultural background'.

Conclusion

- The type of information on 'cultural background' that is required and the purposes to which these data will be put must be decided prior to any decision being made on the variables to be collected. This may clarify whether, for example, information on language or on participation of workers from particular ethnic groups is required.
- If possible, more than one measure should be collected to facilitate interpretation of results. In deciding on the number of measures, however, respondent burden must be taken into consideration.
- The ABS standards should be followed if possible, to enable comparison with national census data. This is particularly important for examining participation rates of different groups.
- The measures used should be consistent, where possible, with those used for cultural background of child (Section 5.9).

5.11 Family type

Introduction

It is important to collect information on the type of family of children who attend child care for a number of reasons. For example, it may be useful to examine how different types of families use child care and preschools to look at whether children from a particular family type are more likely to use child care and preschools than children from other family types, and to monitor the effect of various policy changes (in children's services, employment and other related areas) on the participation of children from different family types.

The *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* notes the importance of collecting information on families, including family type (AIHW 1998a:3.57):

Data on families are essential elements for the study of the well-being of family groups and in this way for the study of the well-being of individuals. They are a tool for assessing the type of and level of support to which a person has access.

Within the categories of children accorded priority of access to child care under the CP guidelines, children from single parent families are among the special groups warranting consideration. Not surprisingly, single parents often have a greater need for child care than couple families, since there is not another resident parent available to assist in caring for children. They are also often financially disadvantaged in comparison with couple families. It is therefore particularly important to monitor participation of children from single parent families in child care and preschool services.

Description

CP Census

The 1997 CP Census questionnaires for long day care centres, family day care and before/after school care services included a question on 'Parent activity', within which there were two broad family type classifications: sole parent and two parents (see Section 5.12). The questionnaire for occasional care centres did not include family type under 'Parent Activity' but included an option for 'sole parent/guardian' to be identified under the 'Special groups/cultural background' section. The questionnaire for vacation care services, however, did not include a question on family type under either the 'Parent activity' or the 'Special groups/cultural background' questions.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS survey (on the household form) included the standard labour force survey questions on marital status (married, de facto, separated, divorced, widowed, never married) for each person in the household and number and age of all children living in the household.

South Australia

The South Australian data collections for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, preschools and integrated services centres included a question on 'Usual Parent/Guardian Status' in the section on 'Child Details' for children who attended during the reference week. The classification used was: 1 'Two Parent Home'; 2 'Guardian/s'; 3 'One Parent Home/Mother'; 4 'One Parent Home/Father'; 88 'Other'; 99 'Not known'.

The South Australian questionnaires for outside school hours care did not ask about parent/guardian status. There was, however, a question asking for the main reason children attended the service. The responses for this question included 'single parent studying', 'single parent working', 'both parents studying', 'both parents working', and 'one parent working, one studying'.

Victoria

The Victorian TAFE child care centres and outside school hours care questionnaires asked service providers to estimate the percentage of children from a sole parent family in the section on 'Profile of users'.

Discussion

The prime interest appears to be in obtaining information on the number of children from single parent and couple families.

It is important to note that the data on family type will be accurate only if the information is sought either directly or indirectly from parents/guardians of the child.

In 1997, the CP Census did not collect information on family type consistently across all child care services, and did not collect it for all services.

The categories of parent/guardian status used in the South Australian survey, 'Two Parent Home' and 'One Parent Home', are ambiguous. It is likely that these mean 'child lives a two-parent home' and 'child lives in a one-parent home' respectively.

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics

The ABS has a strong commitment to developing standards for statistics on the family to facilitate the comparability and compatibility of data derived from different statistical sources and systems. With this aim, it has published *Standards for statistics on the family* (ABS 1995a). These standards are used in all ABS household surveys where information on the family is collected and in the 1996 ABS Population Census. The ABS advises that 'The standards are intended for use wherever social, labour and demographic statistics on family type are collected, processed and disseminated' (ABS 1995a:39).

The ABS has a Family Statistics User Advisory Group, established by the ABS Family Statistics Unit. One of the aims of this group is to assist in the development and implementation of standards to be used in family-related collections in order to improve comparability and accuracy of family statistics.

While recognising that notions of what constitutes a family vary considerably, the practicalities of collecting the data inherently involves a narrowing of the definition of the family unit and restricting who is considered a family member.

The standard definition of family for all ABS social surveys is:

Two or more persons, one of whom is at least 15 years of age, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or defacto), adoption, step or fostering, and who are usually resident in the same household. The basis of a family is formed by identifying the presence of a couple relationship, lone parent-child relationship or other blood relationship. Some households will, therefore, contain more than one family. (ABS 1995b:7)

A *household* is defined as 'a group of two or more related or unrelated people who usually reside in the same dwelling, and who make common provision for food or other essentials for living; or a person living in a dwelling who makes provision for his or her own food and other essentials for living without combining with any other person'.

For practical reasons (as most ABS social surveys are based on the household) the definition restricts the concept of a family to those usually resident in the same household. A concept of a family that extended beyond the household would necessarily allow some individuals to be included in more than one family.

The four main variables that are used in describing family structure within a household are:

- relationship in household – a characteristic of each individual living in a household. This variable is used to record the familial and non-familial relationships between these individuals.
- family type – differentiates families based on the presence or absence of couple relationships, parent-child relationships, child dependency relationships or other blood relationships.
- household type – used to identify family households, the number of families in a household, the presence of non-family members in family households, and non-family households.
- marital status – marital status of individuals.

The ABS standard definitions and classifications for family type are as follows. (The detailed classification is given in ABS 1995b:51)

- Couple family with children
With dependent children

- With non-dependent children only
- Couple family without children
- One parent family
- Other family
- Not stated/Inadequately described

A *couple family* is a 'family based on two persons who are in a registered or de facto marriage and who are usually resident in the same household. A couple family without children may have other relatives, such as ancestors, present. A couple family with children may have adult children and/or other relatives present'.

Dependent children are 'all family members under 15 years of age; family members aged 15-19 years attending school or aged 15-24 years attending a tertiary educational institution full-time (except those classified as husbands, wives or lone parents)'.

One-parent families are 'families consisting of a lone parent with at least one dependent or non-dependent child (regardless of age) who is usually resident in the household. The family may also include any number of other dependent children, non-dependent children and other related individuals. One parent families may be further classified as either lone mother families or lone father families'.

Other families are families of 'related individuals residing in the same household. These individuals do not form a couple or parent-child relationship with any other person in the household and are not attached to a couple or one-parent family in the household. For example, a household consisting of a brother and sister only'.

National Community Service Data Dictionary, Version 1.0 and National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0

The *National Community Service Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* and the *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0* both include 'family' as a data concept, which is defined as:

Two or more people related by blood, marriage, adoption or fostering and who may or may not live together. They may form the central core of support networks for individuals.
(AIHW 1998a:3.5)

It is difficult, however, to define 'family type' using this definition of 'family'. As pointed out early in this section, where the concept of 'family' is not restricted to those living together, a person may be included in more than one 'family'. A child whose parents are divorced, for instance, will be a member of at least two families—one of these families including the parent with whom he or she is living, and the other including the non-resident parent.

Consequently, the National Health and National Community Services Data Dictionaries' data element 'Family type' restricts the concept of 'family' to those living in the household. The source of this data element is the *ABS Standards for statistics on families*, as outlined above (ABS 1995b). The dictionaries define 'family type' as:

The composition of the family household. The differentiation of families is based on the presence or absence of couple relationships, parent-child relationships, child dependency relationships or other blood relationships, in that order of precedence.

Categories are: 1 Couple family with children; 2 Couple family without children; 3 One parent family; 4 Other family; 9 Not stated/Inadequately described.

The dictionaries also include a data concept called 'Household' which is similar to the ABS definition:

...a group of two or more related or unrelated people who usually reside in the same dwelling, who regard themselves as a household and who make common provision for food or other essentials for living; or a person living in a dwelling who makes provision for his or her own food and other essentials.

New South Wales

As part of the question on 'employment status' on the parent survey form, parents are asked to identify themselves as either a 'two parent family' or a 'sole parent family' (see Section 5.12).

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

One of the performance indicators used in the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, 'Proportion of special needs groups using services relative to their population proportions', is defined as—'the share of children using child care and preschool services belonging to a given special needs group over a sample week relative to the share of all children 12 years of age and younger in the population who belong to the given special needs group'. One of these 'special needs groups' is 'children from single parent families'.

Conclusion

While it may be considered desirable to conform with the ABS standards for 'family type', in order for the data collected to be comparable with population estimates, the use of the category 'other families' is probably not necessary in a children's services data collection. The proportion of children living in these families is small and some types of families (e.g. siblings living together) will probably be less common where they are young children.

For the purposes of a children's services data collection family type could be classified as: 1 Couple family with children under 15 years; 2 One parent family with children under 15 years; 9 Not stated/Inadequately described.

Information may need to be obtained from the ABS as to how 'other families' could be mapped to this classification.

5.12 Parent's labour force status

Introduction

One of the main reasons for the growth in demand for child care in Australia has been the increasing participation by mothers in the labour force (AIHW 1995:125). One of the goals of the CP is to improve access to child care arrangements for parents in the labour force and for parents who are studying or training for work (DHFS 1996b:173). In 1997, the then Minister for Family Services, the Hon. Judi Moylan, stated that the 'primary objective' of the program ... 'is work-related care. Work-related care is defined as care required by families where both parents are or the single parent is working, looking for work, studying or training' (Hansard, as cited in SCARC 1998:54). Thus, under CP priority of access guidelines, first priority in accessing child care places in most types of CP-funded child care services is given to parents who need 'work-related' care (AIHW 1997a:102).

There is also considerable interest in the use of preschool services by the increasing number of families with both parents (or a single parent) in the labour force, given the criticism by some observers that sessional preschools do not meet the needs of working families. One of

the main areas of interest is the extent to which these families are using sessional preschools or are accessing preschool services in other settings, such as long day care centres (Moyle et al. 1996:47-49). This is also an issue for families where parents are studying/training.

It is thus important to obtain information about the labour force or studying/training status of parents of children using children's services. Many data collections obtain some or all of this information for some or all service types.

Description of questions

CP Census

All the CP Census questionnaires obtained information about parental labour force/studying status from a question 'Parent Activity'. Respondents in long day care centres and family day care providers were asked to report on 'parent activity' of each child according to one of five different categories. Two categories related to sole parents: 'employed full or part-time, or *unemployed* and actively seeking employment, or studying/training for employment' (1); or 'not in option 1 above' (2). The other three categories were for two parent families: 'both parents employed full or part-time, and/or *unemployed* and actively seeking employment, and/or studying training for employment' (3); 'one parent disabled and not working, the other parent work related' (4); or 'none of the above'. Respondents were instructed to treat maternity leave of up to 12 months as 'work-related'. The 'parent activity' question for before/after school care service providers was the same as that for long day care services except that there was no fifth option and option 4 was 'two parents – one or both *not in option 3 above*'. The 'parental activity' question for vacation care services and occasional care centres, had only two options: 'Appointments, household activities, leisure/recreational activities, non-vocational courses'; or 'Parent(s) employed full-time or part-time, unemployed and actively seeking employment, on maternity leave or studying/training for employment'.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey is conducted as a supplement to the ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey. Information is obtained through the latter survey on the labour force status of every person aged 15 or older living in the same household as the respondent using the maximum set of labour force questions (ABS 1995b:Section 15:7). These questions are then used to classify individuals to the categories of 'employed', 'unemployed' or 'not in the labour force', using the ABS standard definition of these terms. (See ABS 1995b:Section 15:14-16). These standard definitions are as follows:

'Employed persons' comprise all those aged 15 years and over who, during the reference week:

- (i) worked for one hour or more for pay, profit, commission or payment in kind in a job or business, or on a farm (comprising Employees, Employers and Own Account Workers); or
- (ii) worked for one hour or more without pay in a family business or on a farm (i.e. Contributing Family Workers); or
- (iii) were Employees who had a job but were not at work and were: on paid leave; on leave without pay for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week; stood down without pay because of bad weather or plant breakdown at their place of employment for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week; on strike or

locked out; on workers' compensation and expected to be returning to their job; or receiving wages or salary while undertaking full-time study; or

- (iv) were Employers, Own Account Workers or Contributing Family Workers who had a job, business or farm, but were not at work.

'Unemployed persons' are those aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the reference week, and;

- (i) had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in 4 weeks up to the end of the reference week and;
 - (a) were available for work in the reference week, and would have been available except for temporary illness (i.e. lasting for less than 4 weeks to the end of the reference week); or
 - (b) were waiting to start a new job within 4 weeks from the end of the reference week and would have started in the reference week if the job had been available then; or
- (ii) were waiting to be called back to a full-time or part-time job from which they had been stood down without pay for less than 4 weeks up to the end of the reference week (including the whole of the reference week) for reasons other than bad weather or plant breakdown.

'Persons not in the labour force' are those persons who, during the reference week, were not in the categories 'employed' or 'unemployed'. They include persons who were keeping house (unpaid), retired, voluntarily inactive, permanently unable to work, persons in institutions (hospitals, gaols, sanatoriums, etc.), trainee teachers, members of contemplative religious orders, and persons whose only activity during the reference week was jury service or unpaid voluntary work for a charitable organisation (ABS 1995b:Section 15:67-71).

The 1996 ABS Child Care Survey, however, used a slightly different definition of 'employed' from the standard ABS definition. The survey included persons who were normally excluded from the standard ABS definition—'those who worked for less than 1 hour in the reference week; and persons on leave without pay for more than 4 weeks' and excluded those who would normally be included in the standard ABS definition—'persons receiving payment in kind from an employer; and persons operating their own incorporated enterprise, with or without hiring employees' (ABS 1997:44).

The ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey obtained information on the school attendance of household members aged 15 to 20 years and on whether household members 15-24 years not attending school were studying full-time at an educational institution. No information was obtained on whether any other members of the household were studying or training full- or part-time.

The ABS Child Care Survey asked a number of questions regarding the reasons why children were using care (all reasons attended and main reason attended), with options categorised according to whether they related to the parent or to the child. The options relating to parents included 'work', 'look for work', 'work-related studying/training' and 'other studying/training'.

South Australia

The South Australian questionnaires for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, integrated services and preschool services obtained information on the labour force status of the individual parents of each child. Respondents were asked to record the 'employment status' of each child's 'female parent/guardian' and 'male parent/guardian' according to

one of the following options: employed (full-time); employed (part-time); casual employment; student; unemployed; pension or benefit recipient other than unemployed or student; not employed in the paid work-force; self-employed; not known; or 'other'. There was an additional option for long day care centres—'employed (parental leave)'. Information for outside school hours care services was collected on an aggregate basis. For before/after school care services, respondents were asked to report 'Number of children attending over reference week whose main reason for attending the program' according to a number of categories, including 'single parent studying', 'single parent working', 'both parents studying', 'both parents working', 'one parent working, one studying'. In the vacation care questionnaire, respondents were asked to report 'no. of children' by 'reason for attendance during the reference week', using the same options as the before/after school care questionnaire. Only one reason could be given for each child.

Victoria

None of the forms in the Victorian data collection included direct questions asking for parents' labour force or study/training status. Forms for TAFE child care centres, outside school hours care services and occasional care (TAB) services had questions on 'reasons for using child care' with relevant categories included as possible options. The TAFE child care form requested information on 'reasons for use in 1997' for community parents, with respondents asked to estimate the percentage of community *parents* who used the service for either 'study elsewhere', 'work related', 'respite' or 'other (specify)'. The question for outside school hours care services '(principal reason) reasons for use in 1997', asked respondents to estimate the percentage of *children* using the service for one of a number of options, including 'a single parent or both parents that are employed, seeking work or undertaking work-related training'. For the occasional care question 'reasons for attendance (take-a-break only)', respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of total *attendances* occurring because 'the parent/caregiver' was taking part in one of several options, including 'attending courses or activities run by your centre', 'attending courses not run by your centre' or 'working'.

Discussion

Some data collections obtain information directly on parent's labour force and/or study training status, some ask for 'reasons for using care' with labour force and/or study/training as possible options, while the ABS Child Care Survey collects both types of information. It is not possible, however, to obtain accurate data on parents' labour force/study status by asking parents their 'reasons for using care', since some families with both parents (or a single parent) in the labour force do not necessarily use specific services for 'work-related' reasons (AIHW 1997a:116). It is not clear how service providers obtain information on 'reason for using care'; it is possible that they infer 'reason' from parents' labour force/study status.

For these data items, most data collections count *children* (e.g. CP, South Australian collections), some count *parents* (e.g. ABS Child Care Survey, Victorian TAFE child care) while the Victorian occasional care collection counted *attendances*. The ABS Child Care Survey collects data that are attached to each relevant child when the data are processed.

The CP Census 'work-related care' categories combine parent in the labour force with those who are studying/training. It is therefore not possible to separate out children with parents who are in the labour force from children with parents who are not in the labour force, but who are studying/training. The ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey (to which the Child Care

Survey is a supplement) obtains data on the labour force status of parents, but not on the study/training status of all parents. The South Australian data collection for TAFE child care centres, integrated services and preschool services obtains information for each parent on whether the parent is working, unemployed or studying. This question is problematic, however, since some parents may fall into more than one category, for instance, a parent may work part-time and study part-time.

Only the South Australian question for TAFE child care centres, integrated services and preschools has the category 'employed' disaggregated into 'employed full-time' and 'employed part-time', although there is no definition given of the terms 'full-time' and 'part-time'. The ABS defines persons employed full-time as working 35 or more hours a week and those employed part-time as working less than 35 hours a week. The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0*, however, provides other definitions of full-time—37.5 and 40 hours (AIHW 1998b:264). It is possible also that for some types of employment, such as for teachers in sessional preschools, 'full-time work' can be less than 35 hours a week.

Where parents' labour force/study status is obtained from service providers, it is not clear how this information is obtained from parents and when it is obtained. For example, if the information was originally obtained some months previous to the data collection, does it reflect changes in parental labour force/study status which may have occurred since that time?

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics

There are three sets of questions used by the ABS to determine 'labour force status'—the maximum set used in the Monthly Labour Force Survey, the minimum set (13 questions) used in all other household surveys and the third module (five questions) used in 'self enumerated collections' such as the 1996 ABS Population Census (ABS 1995a:Section 15:53). Data obtained in the census using the self-enumeration module 'produce labour force status estimates compatible with the Labour Force Survey' (ABS 1995a:Section 15:61).

The 1996 ABS Census Dictionary provides definitions of the various categories of 'labour force status' which are less detailed than the standard ABS definition. The Dictionary defines 'employed people' as those who 'work for payment or profit, or as an unpaid helper in a family business, during the week prior to census night; have a job from which they are on leave or otherwise temporarily absent; or are on strike or stood down temporarily'. 'Unemployed people' are those 'who do not have a job but are actively looking for work and available to start work'. People 'not in the labour force' are those who are 'not employed or unemployed' including 'people who are retired, pensioners and people engaged solely in home duties'. (ABS 1996a:182-3).

The 1996 ABS Population Census also collected information, for every person in the household, on whether the person was attending a school or any other educational institution. The question was 'Is this person attending a school or any other educational institution' with the options 'No'; 'Yes, full-time student'; and 'Yes, part-time student'. If individuals responded 'Yes', they were asked 'What type of educational institution is the person attending?' with options including various types of secondary schools, 'technical or further educational institution (including TAFE Colleges)', 'university or other higher educational institution' and 'other educational institution'.

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

The *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1* defines 'labour force status' as being 'the self-reported status the person currently has in being either in the labour force (employed/unemployed) or not in the labour force'. The three categories 'employed', 'unemployed' and 'not in the labour force' are defined according to the standard ABS definition (AIHW 1998a:3.33-3.35).

Other CP definitions

The CP definition of 'work-related commitments' (parents' labour force study status), for the purposes of the work test for claiming more than 50 hours of Childcare Assistance for a child in a week, is as follows:

'Work-related commitments include:

- paid work (including self-employment) – work-related commitments include annual paid recreation leave for not more than a period of 25 days, whether or not continuous; and sick leave for not more than a continuous period of 25 days, and on the job training.
- attending a course of education or training to improve work skills and/or employment prospects – work-related commitments only include the time spent actually attending the site of study or training (e.g. on campus). This does not include time spent studying at home.
- actively looking for work – work-related commitments only include the time spent actively looking for work, for example attending interviews or applying for jobs. Parents who are registered as looking for work but are not actively looking for work do not have work-related commitments. It is likely that parents who are actively looking for work would only be able to claim more than 50 hours Childcare Assistance occasionally – for example when they have extensive travel to attend an interview away from their home town.
- actively setting up a business that has not started to operate' (DHFS 1998 Appendix F. Section F1.1)

The work test for the Childcare Rebate and for 20 hours or more of Childcare Assistance is somewhat different from the '50 hour test'. The labour force/study status categories for this test are as follows:

- in paid work, including self-employment
- in the process of setting up a business which is yet to start operating
- offered work which commences in 14 days
- on paid leave from their employment
- on unpaid sick or parental leave
- able to show that they are actively looking for work
- undertaking training to improve work skills or employment prospects
- undertaking study or on an end of term or semester break from study other than a vacation taken at the conclusion of study commitments.

The following definitions are given for this 'work test':

'Paid work' includes employees, self-employment, casual work and on the job training.

'Paid leave' comprises sick leave (for up to 2 years), annual leave for recreational purposes (as long as this does not exceed 25 days in a year), long service leave, parental leave (as long as

the combined total of both parents does not exceed 12 months) and any other paid leave taken under legislative provisions or an award or enterprise agreement.

'Unpaid leave' – Parents on unpaid leave will only meet the work test if they are on sick leave or parental leave. Parents who are on any other forms of unpaid leave will not meet the work test for any week where they are on unpaid leave for the whole of that week. Self-employed people and carers will meet the work test if they are ill or injured and have a doctor's certificate; or alternatively if they are on leave that, if they were an employee, would be described as annual, long service or parental leave.

'On call/Casual employment' – People working in 'on call' or casual employment are only eligible for more than 20 hours of Childcare Assistance (Childcare Rebate) in weeks when they actually work.

'Voluntary work' – Only volunteer work that is undertaken to improve work skills or employment prospects will satisfy the work test.

'Study' – Parents who receive assistance under a Commonwealth AUSTUDY or ABSTUDY scheme; or are enrolled in an adult Migrant English Program administered by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in order to improve their employment prospects; or are undertaking any other course for the purposes of improving their work skills or employment prospects (DHFS 1998:Appendix G. Section G1.4 and G1.5).

The CP definitions used for the purposes of the '50 hour limit' and the '20 hour limit' are very specific to the eligibility criteria and are not comparable with definitions of 'parent's work-status' used in the ABS collections.

New South Wales

The New South Wales data collection obtains information on whether or not parents are in paid employment directly from parents, using the form completed by parents. The question, however, used the categories 'working full-time', 'working part-time' and 'in unpaid workforce'. It was not therefore possible to ascertain whether parents were studying, training or unemployed.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

There are two descriptive indicators in the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision which use data on parents' labour force status. One indicator 'Children (12 years and younger) with working parents' is defined as 'The total number of children (12 years and younger) who have working parents', and uses data on the 'labour force status' of parents from the ABS Child Care Survey. The other indicator 'Labour force status of parents of children (12 years and younger) by service type, whose parents are participating in the workforce' also uses these ABS data.

Conclusion

Information on parents' labour force status and on parents' study status could be obtained through one question; information would be sought for each co-resident parent, similar to the South Australian questionnaire for TAFE Child Care Centres, integrated services and preschools.

Parents could be asked to report their labour force status and study status at the time of the data collection on the type of self-completion form used in the New South Wales collection. If data are collected on individual children, there would need to be some way of linking data

from this questionnaire to the data collected by service providers. If collecting information directly from parents is considered to be too costly, alternative methods of obtaining accurate information need to be explored.

It is recommended that the question be titled 'Employment/Study status' with the following options: 1 Employed; 2 Unemployed; 3 Studying/Training for employment and not in categories 1 or 2; 4 Not in the labour force and not in categories 1, 2 or 3.

The ABS Child Care Survey definitions of the terms could be attached to the questionnaire. This would also facilitate comparability with population estimates.

5.13 Family Income

Introduction

It is a generally held principle that child care services should be affordable for parents. Consequently, the Commonwealth Government and some State and Territory Governments provide funding for fee subsidies for this purpose. It is also generally agreed that preschool services should be accessible to children of the relevant age, regardless of their family income. A number of jurisdictions thus provide funding to reduce fees for children in low-income families.

While there are a number of issues in regard to how affordability of children's services should be measured, affordability is usually assessed by examining costs in relation to family (or rather parental) income. One of the performance indicators for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision that measures the 'affordability of children's services' is 'out of pocket costs relative to family income for children's services'. A new performance indicator of affordability, 'usage by income', is also to be developed.

It may also be useful to examine the incomes of families using children's services in order to assess 'take-up rates', that is, the extent to which families using children's services, who are eligible for fee subsidies, actually receive these subsidies. Currently, only the ABS Child Care Survey collects information on family income.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Census did not collect information on family income. Instead, 'assessed family income' was estimated for children receiving the long day care rate of Childcare Assistance using data on 'percentage of Childcare Assistance paid' and 'number of eligible children in the family this percentage relates to' (see Section 6.3).

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey collected information about sources of income (including sources such as earned income, government payments, maintenance and superannuation); current total gross weekly income in income ranges; and main source of income. These data were collected for each parent in a couple family and for sole parents. 'Total weekly income before tax is taken out' is income from all sources – for instance, sources such as wages and salaries, government benefits and child maintenance. In order to determine income, the

respondent was given a prompt card which had two columns 'total weekly pay' and 'total annual pay', with the instructions 'BEFORE tax or anything else is taken out'. Respondents were requested to specify in which of the 16 income ranges (in either the 'weekly' or 'annual' column) their income fell and in which range their partner's income fell.

Discussion

In the CP Census, because data on 'assessed family income' are estimated from data on receipt of the long day care rate of Childcare Assistance, no data are available for those ineligible for Childcare Assistance nor are detailed income data for families eligible for the full rate of Childcare Assistance. In the period covered by this paper, detailed data on 'assessed family income' could not be estimated for children in outside school hours care. This is because at this time, the outside school hours care rate of Childcare Assistance was only payable as either a 'full' rate or a 'partial rate'. With the changes to outside school hours care funding, which occurred in April 1998, this problem will be overcome for the 1999 Child Care Census data.

'Assessed family income' data in the CP Census include taxable income only. In the ABS Child Care Survey, 'family income' includes both taxable and non-taxable income.

Parental income obtained from the 1996 ABS Survey is a somewhat approximate measure. For instance, for two-parent families, parental income is derived by taking a mid-point of the range within which each parent's income falls (or an estimated income level for the top income range) and summing the two income points. The 1999 ABS Child Care Survey, however, will ask for parental income in individual dollars rather than in income ranges.

The word 'pay' used on the prompt card for the ABS Child Care Survey income question is not synonymous with 'income', since 'pay' generally means 'earned income'. Using the term 'pay' on the prompt card for the income question may be confusing to respondents. For instance, when a parent derives some or all of his/her income from sources such as government pensions/benefits or child support/maintenance, these may not be included in the reported 'income'.

In the ABS Child Care Survey, it is not possible to report '0' or negative income, yet it is quite possible that a mother, for instance, may have no income if her partner's income is too high to qualify the family for the Commonwealth family payment.

Other data collections/definitions

New South Wales

The New South Wales data collection asks for parental income on the self-completion form for parents. Respondents are asked to 'indicate your combined gross income' according to one of four income ranges. 'Income' is defined as '...taxable income. Do not include allowances such as welfare benefits, family assistance, home child care allowance or disability allowances for children'. The definition of income and the income ranges specified in the questionnaire relate to the eligibility criteria for the various levels of fee subsidies provided by the State Government. For instance, families with incomes in the third-highest range of incomes specified are eligible for the lowest fee subsidy (75% of the assessed subsidy), while families with incomes in the highest range specified are not eligible for any subsidy.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The performance indicators used in the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision do not have any definition of 'income'. The indicator 'out of pocket costs relative to family income', for instance, is defined as 'average amount paid for child care per week by families using these services' as a proportion of the 'average weekly income of families with children in care' with data disaggregated by income quartile. Since the source of these data is the ABS Child Care Survey, 'average weekly family income' follows the definition used in that survey—the total weekly gross income of both parents (in a two-parent family) or of a single parent.

ABS 1996 Census of Population and Housing

The ABS 1996 Census of Population and Housing collected details of the income of every person in the household. Respondents were asked to report 'the gross income (including pensions and allowances) that the person usually receives each week from all sources' according to one of 16 income ranges. The instructions stated that all income for the person should be counted and included a list of 17 items of earned and unearned income, such as family payment, pensions, wages and salaries, interest and dividends and business income (less operating expenses). Respondents were instructed not to deduct tax, superannuation and health insurance from 'gross income'.

The income ranges used in the 1996 Census were almost identical to the income ranges used in the 1996 Child Care Survey, with the following exceptions: the highest income category in the census was \$1,500 a week or more, compared with \$2,000 and over in the Child Care Survey; the sixth and seventh income categories in the Child Care Survey (\$200–249 and \$250–299) were collapsed into one income category (\$200–299) in the census; and the census question contained the income categories 'Nil income' and 'Negative income'. The ABS continuous Survey of Income and Housing was used to estimate an 'average income' within each income category. Family income was then derived by adding the incomes of each of the parents (that is, the 'average incomes' within the relevant categories) (ABS 1996a:167).

Conclusion

Parental income is an important data item and should be collected. Given its sensitive nature, a question such as the ABS 1996 Census question that asks respondents to report family income in ranges would be the preferred method. Income data could be collected from parents themselves, as in the New South Wales questionnaire. Ideally, using the definition of income and the income ranges used in the ABS 1996 Census (with those ranges adjusted by the Consumer Price Index) would enable the income profile of families using formal child care to be compared with the incomes of families in the total population. This will be problematic, however, in jurisdictions where it is necessary to collect income according to the definition of income and the income categories used in the eligibility criteria for fee subsidies.

Income data collected as part of the operation of the new streamlined family assistance scheme should enable the distribution of incomes of recipients of the Childcare Benefit to be compared with the income distribution of other families receiving family assistance. Not all families using formal child care and preschool services or informal child care services, however, may claim the Childcare Benefit. Additionally, not all families in the population receive family assistance.

5.14 Geographic location: service provider and child

Introduction

In a children's services data collection, the data element 'geographic location' can refer either to the physical location of the agency providing the service or to the place of residence of the child; both are discussed here. Information on both the distribution of service providers and the distribution of children who access these services has relevance for policy development in the children's services area, as indicators of supply and demand respectively.

Description of questions

CP Census

In the 1997 CP Census, all questionnaires except the family day care caregiver's form obtain data on the name and address of the agency providing the service. The caregiver's form asked for the caregiver's postcode and suburb. When the CP data were processed, each service provider's address was mapped to a Statistical Local Area (SLA) and the Rural and Remote Area classification (RRRA) (see below) used to classify service providers according to whether they were in a urban, rural or remote location. None of the CP Census forms asked for any details relating to the address or geographic location of the children using the service. The Department of Family and Community Services have advised the new Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) (see below) will be used to classify the 1999 CP Census data.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Child Care Survey is a household-based survey and, as such, collected detailed information on the address of the household, but not on the address of the location of the service used by the child.

Victoria

The Victorian data collection forms asked for the name and address of the 'funded agency' (sponsor) lodging the form and also for the name and address of the 'service location' (service provider) to which the form related.

South Australia

The South Australian census collected information on the name and address of the service provider. In addition, South Australian questionnaires for long day care centres, preschools and TAFE child care centres asked for the postcode of the child's residence. Respondents were also asked to identify the Special Need category most appropriate for each child, one of these categories being 'geographic isolation' (with the note 'refers to the child who is unable to access a variety of services due to distance/isolation'). The preschool form also asked respondents to list the name and suburb/town of four major schools where the majority of children attending the preschool were enrolled and to estimate the percentage of children enrolling at each of these four schools. One of the 'special needs' categories in the questionnaires for outside school hours care, family day care, and occasional care services was 'geographical isolation'; this was defined as in the other questionnaires.

Discussion

All of the data collections except the ABS Child Care Survey included information on the address of the service provider, which presumably includes a postcode. Very few of the data collections, however, sought information on the geographic location of the child.

Other data collections/definitions

Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area Classification

The Rural, Remote Area and Metropolitan Area (RRMA) classification was developed jointly by the then Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health and the then Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy in 1994 (DPIE & DSHS 1994). The seven categories according to which Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) are classified are as follows: 'capital cities'; 'other metropolitan centres'; 'large rural centres'; 'small rural centres'; 'other rural areas'; 'remote centres'; and 'other remote areas'.

Prior to 1994 the Rural and Remote Area Classification was developed by the then Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health (DSHS 1994). Each SLA was classified according to one of seven categories: 'capital city'; 'other major urban'; 'rural major'; 'rural other'; 'remote major'; 'remote other'; and 'other offshore areas'.

Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia

The ARIA classification was developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA) on behalf of the Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC), under a steering committee of user Departments and the ABS, and released early in 1999 (DHAC 1999). In brief, GISCA used a geographic information system (GIS) methodology to produce a remoteness index and classification, and a database of road, locality and service information. ARIA interprets remoteness as accessibility to 201 service centres. Remoteness values for 11,338 populated localities are derived from the road distance to service centres in 4 categories. Values for populated localities are interpolated to a 1 kilometre grid, and averages calculated for larger areas. These values are grouped into five categories: 1 Highly accessible; 2 Accessible; 3 Moderately accessible; 4 Remote; 5 Very remote.

While no attempt was made to 'force' the classification of individual areas to correspond to that under the RRMA, it was considered desirable that one or more of the categories correspond in size to the 'Remote Zones' ('Remote Centres plus Other Remote Areas') of the RRMA. These two categories correspond most closely to the 'Remote' plus 'Very Remote' categories in the ARIA classification shown above.

Remoteness values are produced at Census Collection District (CD), Postcode and SLA levels.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Population estimates are available from the ABS according to a number of geographic structures:

- Information from the Census of Population and Housing is available from Census Collection District level through to whole of Australia. Census data are available by Postal Area of CD of Enumeration (CD-Derived Postal Areas) and Postal Area of Usual Residence. A Postal Area of CD of Enumeration is formed by aggregating whole CDs

- that fall within the physical boundaries of an Australia Post postcode (Postcode) on a 'best fit' basis.
- ABS household surveys, including the Child Care Survey, collect detailed information on the address of the respondent for survey management and processing purposes, the lowest level the data are available is SLA (not Postcode).
- The Demography area of the ABS produces resident population estimates by postcodes on a fee-for-service consultancy basis.
- The ABS Census package SEIFA96 (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas 96) uses data from the 1996 Census of Population and Housing to construct five indexes to summarise the social and economic conditions of the Australian population by geographic area. (ABS 1998c). SEIFA 96 provides information and the ranking for a wide range of geographic areas, including Collectors Districts, postcodes, Local Government Areas (LGAs), SLAs, Statistical Subdivisions, and States and Territories.

For further information see the ABS publications listed in the References (ABS 1996b).

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0 and National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0

Both the *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* and the *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0* have a composite element called 'address' which is defined as 'A place at which a person or organisation may be contacted/located, or where an object/item may be located or the location where a service may be delivered.' The dictionaries note that this data element is 'required for primary collection to facilitate contact with client, person or service provider' (AIHW 1998a:3.103).

The dictionaries also include a data element called 'postcode' defined as 'the postcode for the address at which the person resides'. In the guide for usage it is stated that the 'postcode book is updated more than once a year as postcodes are a dynamic entity and are constantly changing' (AIHW 1998a:3.102).

Both dictionaries also have a 'unique agency identifier' for the establishment in which the episode of care or the service event occurred. Desirable components of a unique agency identifier include State identifier, Establishment sector and Agency number.

The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0* has a State identifier which is a unique code for each state. This can be used in conjunction with other codes (such as SLA and agency number) to develop unique identifiers for individual agencies.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

One of the performance indicators for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision is 'the share of children from rural or remote areas using child care and preschool services relative to the share of all children 12 years of age and under in the population who are from rural or remote areas'. Since the CP Census (the major source of data for these indicators) does not collect any data about children's residence, it appears that the data for this indicator are derived by categorising children according to the agency location.

The Data Manual defines 'rural and remote areas' as 'per the 1994 Human Services and Health and Department of Primary Industry and Energy publication *Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification 1991 Census Edition*' which assigns a measure of remoteness to each SLA in Australia'. A list of SLAs and the corresponding area classification is provided in an appendix to the data manual for jurisdictions to use 'to establish the total number of rural and remote places receiving State or Territory funding only'. (The

classification used in the appendix, however, is the RRRA classification not the RRMA classification as stated in the definition.)

Queensland Child Care survey

The data collection obtains information about the name of the agency providing the service and its geographical catchment area. In addition, service providers are asked whether the agency is located close (within 5-10 minutes walk) to public transport (close to train station—please specify train stations; close to bus stop—please specify bus route numbers).

Conclusion

Geographic location of service

It is proposed that the location address of a service provider be recorded by capturing the street address of the service provider. The address can be mapped to the ABS Statistical Local Area and the SLA then used to assign a classification from the ARIA index as: 'highly accessible', 'accessible', 'moderately accessible', 'remote', 'very remote'.

Due to confidentiality issues, the street address of home-based carers, including family day caregivers, would not be collected. The reporting unit would be the management body (defined in Chapter 2), and the management body's street address would be coded to SLA.

The Children's Services Data Working Group should consider whether the postcode of all service providers should also be collected and computed to an ARIA classification, as the postcode of all service providers, including home-based carers, could be collected. Postcode may be a better indicator of geographic location for home-based care than SLA given the privacy considerations.

Geographic location of place of residence of child

The feasibility of developing a data item on the geographic location of place of residence of child for a children's services data collection would make an interesting research project. Such a paper could examine the collection and coding issues associated with 'SLA of child's residence' and 'postcode of the child's residence'. These data could be compared with demographic data and with information on the geographic distribution of service providers (agencies). As with the geographic location of service provider, processing would be required to map postcode and SLA data to enable comparison with other demographic data.

6 Data items: other characteristics of children and families

6.1 Child's school attendance

Introduction

The use of children's services by children enrolled in school, particularly those services designed primarily for children below school age, such as long day care, is an issue in the planning and monitoring of services. Some long day care centres and occasional care services provide before/after school care for school age children, but there has been some debate about the appropriateness of this practice unless the centre has facilities and activities suitable for this age group. Family day care is also an option for parents requiring before/after school care, particularly if the child has previously been cared for or has a younger sibling currently being cared for by the family day care provider.

Information on numbers of children using a service who were also attending school is available from the CP and the ABS data collections.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Census of long day care centres and family day care asked for each child, 'Does this child attend school?' The same question was also asked for each child in the census of occasional care, with an instruction to 'Exclude preschool'.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS survey asked parents the following question about school attendance for each eligible child: 'Does [child's name] attend school?'

Discussion

The question asked in the CP Censuses of long day care centres and family day care about school attendance do not have the instruction to 'exclude preschool', and thus children attending 'preschool' may be recorded as attending 'school'.

A similar problem also occurs with the question used in the ABS, as parents may reply 'Yes' to the question about school attendance of their child, when the child is attending preschool.

Conclusion

A simple question on school attendance by children in long day care services or in occasional care would be helpful in determining the level of use of these services by children in school (as opposed to their use of outside school hours care services). The form of the question could be the same as used in the CP Census and the ABS survey, although it should be made clear that attending 'school' means attending a full-time educational program which is part of the school system (see definitions of service types and school), rather than attending a service at school (location).

6.2 Child's use of other children's services

Introduction

The numbers and proportions of children using more than one type of service is a policy consideration, as some concern has been expressed by parents that they need to use more than one provider at more than one location to obtain the services they require. The 1996 ABS Child Care Survey found that about 7% of children using formal care, other than before/after school care, used more than one service (ABS 1997:12). A certain proportion of this may be children who attend a preschool service in addition to a separate long day care service. One solution to this is to have providers offer more than one type of service from the same location, particularly in the case of preschool and centre-based long day care (see Section 8.6).

Information on numbers of children using more than one service is available in the ABS and South Australian data collections.

Description of questions

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS survey asked parents if, during the reference week, the child was 'cared for in a before or after school care program' or 'at any of these places: long day care centre, family day care, occasional care centre, preschool, other formal care, no/none of these'. The interviewer ticked any forms of care to which a 'Yes' response was given. Another question asked if the child 'attended any vacation care program during school holidays' during the last 12 months.

South Australia

The South Australian censuses of preschools, long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres asked for each child the 'main program at this centre' with a list of possible 'programs'. (For integrated services centres, two responses were possible.) This was followed by a question on children's services used 'not at this centre', with up to two responses possible from another list of 'services'.

The South Australian census of before/after school care providers asked 'Does this program operate a vacation care program in addition to out of school hours care?' Respondents who answered 'Yes' were asked 'How many of the children attending this program also attend the vacation care program?' Such questions were not asked of vacation care providers.

Discussion

Because the ABS survey asked parents if they used each type of service for their children, and recorded all 'Yes' answers, it is possible to tabulate from this source the number of children who used more than one service. However, it is not known whether these services were provided at the same or a different location.

The question asked in some of the South Australian censuses about the use of 'services not at this centre' for each child assumes that the respondent (the centre director or another staff person) would have this information, but it is possible that the respondent did not have this information.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision includes an indicator 'Number of services that a family uses'. No descriptors have yet been developed to measure this indicator.

New South Wales

The New South Wales census of service providers asked 'How many children attended another service during the representative week. Please specify for the types of services.' An instruction stated 'Use your own records and/or collate information from the Parent's Survey to fill out this question.' The categories of 'other service attended' were preschool, long day care, occasional care, family day care, and home-based care. For each of these categories, the respondents were asked to record the number of children attending less than 6 hours and more than 6 hours in the reference week. The 'Parent's Survey' form included a question 'Is your child attending another service during this week? If 'Yes', which type of service?' with a box for 'hours per week' for each of the five services. These questions were somewhat problematic in wording, since although it is probable that 'another service' means 'a service provided by a different service provider' and that this other service was probably provided at a different location, this is not clear.

Conclusion

As with some of the other questions about the child's characteristics, answers provided by children's services workers to questions about the child's use of other services are likely to be less accurate than answers provided by the child's parents. Accuracy of this information is also affected by the nature of the data collection; a collection with individual records for each child will probably have more accurate information on use of other services than an aggregated collection.

If jurisdictions decide that this item should be included in a minimum data set, it is recommended that this information be collected through a parent survey. It is important, however, that the question be clearly phrased to elicit the required information. Jurisdictions need to decide whether the information that is sought is 'use of more than one service', 'use of more than one service where services are provided by different service providers, but at the same location' or 'use of more than one service where services are provided by different service providers at different locations'.

6.3 Receipt of fee relief

Introduction

The purpose of fee subsidies is to make child care more affordable for parents (AIHW 1997a:123). In 1997, there were a variety of types of fee subsidies available for families using particular types of services, including Commonwealth Childcare Assistance (long day care rate and outside school hours care rate), the Commonwealth Childcare Rebate, and State fee relief for some State-funded services. Jurisdictions may require information on the number and proportion of children using services who are receiving fee subsidies, characteristics of recipients, and/or the proportion of those eligible for assistance who are receiving it (i.e. the 'take-up' rate). Since fee subsidies are income-tested (the receipt of subsidies and the amount of the subsidy are dependent on the income level of the child's family), the receipt of a fee subsidy has also been used as a proxy measure for family income.

All data collections gathered information on whether or not children received subsidies, but the type of information collected varied between the four collections. The CP Census collected details of Childcare Assistance for each child for every service type. In South Australia and Victoria, on the other hand, information on fee subsidies was collected only for specific services types -- TAFE child care centres and occasional care services in both jurisdictions; long day care centres and integrated services centres in South Australia; and before/after school care and vacation care services in Victoria. Because of differences in the types of fee subsidies available to families using different types of child care services, questions for long day care services, outside school hours care services and occasional care services are discussed separately. This is followed by a discussion of the ABS Survey, which asked parents about the receipt of Childcare Assistance and the Childcare Cash Rebate, irrespective of the type of formal services they used.

Description of questions

Long day care and family day care

CP Census

Four questions relating to Childcare Assistance were included in the CP Census questionnaires for long day care centres and family day care 'caregivers'. Service providers were asked whether or not Childcare Assistance was *provided* for each child, with the instructions 'formerly known as fee relief'. Respondents were asked to report according to one of three different categories: 1=No; 2=Yes (for less than or equal to 50 hours); 3=Yes (for more than 50 hours). If service providers answered 'Yes', they were asked to report the percentage of Childcare Assistance paid, and the number of eligible children in the family to which this percentage related (both as shown on the current DSS Assessment Notice). Finally, they were asked to report 'allowable absences during the week 18-24 August, 1997' with 'allowable absences' defined as 'a period of absence when the child would normally be in care and CA is paid e.g. sick, vacation, other'.

South Australia

Questions on fee relief in the South Australian data collections for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres related to subsidies in general. Service providers were asked which subsidies were *received* for each child, with the options

'Childcare Assistance (fee relief)'; 'disabled supplement'; 'special fee relief'; 'other'; and 'no subsidy received'. Respondents could select up to two categories.

Victoria

In the Victorian data collection, service providers at TAFE child care centres were asked to estimate the percentage of *users* receiving full Childcare Assistance and the percentage of *users* receiving partial Childcare Assistance. A count of parents and guardians, not individual children, was therefore collected. Users were split into three categories: student parents, staff parents and the general community.

Before/after school care and vacation care services

CP Census

The CP Census for outside school hours care services asked a simple 'Yes/No' question as to whether or not Childcare Assistance was *provided* for each child. In cases where children did receive Childcare Assistance, respondents were asked whether the child received the full or partial rate.

Victoria

Commonwealth model outside school hours care services questionnaires in Victoria contained a question asking for the 'average daily *attendances* on full Childcare Assistance'; and the 'average daily *attendances* on part Childcare Assistance'. The State model outside school hours care form contained a table on attendances by different fee levels, the purpose of which was to help to account for State funds provided for fee relief.

Occasional care

CP Census

The CP Census questions for occasional care centres were very similar, but not identical, to the questions for long day services. Three questions relating to Childcare Assistance were included in the occasional care questionnaire. Firstly, service providers were asked whether or not each child *received* Childcare Assistance. If service providers answered 'Yes', they were asked what percentage of Childcare Assistance the child was *eligible for* in the census week and 'how many children in the family were *eligible for* Childcare Assistance during the census week' (both as shown on the current DSS Assessment Notice).

Victoria

Questions asked in the Victoria occasional care questionnaire were in terms of *discounts* provided. Respondents were asked if they provided discounts and, if so, the reason for the discounts. More than one response was allowed. Reasons for discounts included the 'number of children in family'; 'Commonwealth Health Card'; 'family's economic circumstances'; and 'other (please specify)'.

South Australia

In the South Australian collection, providers were asked to indicate the 'number of children on fee relief attending in [the] reference week' and 'number of children not on fee relief attending in [the] reference week'.

The ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Survey contained a general question asking parents 'Did you *receive* assistance from the Childcare Assistance scheme?' with a 'Yes/No/Don't know' response. There were also two questions that asked if parents had *claimed* (or were intending to claim), the then named Childcare Cash Rebate through Medicare for the cost of child care used in the reference week. The first of these questions related to formal services and the second to informal care. If parents answered 'No' to either of these questions, they were asked for the 'main reason you haven't claimed the Childcare Cash Rebate for the cost of this care' and given a number of options—e.g. 'not aware of rebate', 'carer not registered'.

Discussion

Various approaches have been taken in the four data collections to obtain information on subsidies.

The CP Census collected more detailed information on the receipt of Childcare Assistance than other data collections, with the CP questionnaire for long day care centres and family day care collecting the most detailed set of information.

The wording of the questions varied, both within and between the various data collections. In some instances, respondents were asked if the child *received* some form of subsidy, while in others they were asked if a subsidy was *provided* for the child.

For most collections, the unit of measurement was the 'child or children' (e.g. each child receiving Childcare Assistance). In the Victorian collection for TAFE child care centres, however, the unit of measurement was the 'parent' (i.e. percentage of parents receiving Childcare Assistance), while in the Victorian collection for Commonwealth model outside school hours care services, the unit was 'attendances'.

All CP Census questions asked specifically about the receipt of Commonwealth Childcare Assistance, as did the ABS Survey and some of the South Australian and Victorian questions. Since the Victorian Government does not provide any specific funding for State-funded occasional care services, the Victorian question for these service providers asked about 'discounts'. The South Australian question for occasional care services asked about number of children on 'fee relief', but this term applies both to State-funded fee relief and to Commonwealth Childcare Assistance.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision data manual has the data item 'income support', which is defined as 'any form of fee relief paid by Governments to the users of children's services (for example, Childcare Assistance and Childcare Rebate)'. The use of the term 'income support' in this context is misleading, since this term is used to refer to payments made to people to assist them with their living costs, but not to payments that are tied to specific expenditure, such as child care fees or charges.

Queensland

The Queensland data collection was quite different from the other data collections in asking about Childcare Assistance from the point of view of the service provider—i.e. 'Is your service approved for the Commonwealth's Childcare Assistance?'

Conclusion

Policy makers, service providers, service users and researchers need to be consulted to determine what type of data on fee subsidies needs to be collected. As users of the CP Census data, AIHW recommends that data on the receipt of Childcare Assistance continue to be obtained through the census, to provide information on the proportion of children in child care who receive this subsidy.

The term 'income support' should not be used to refer to child care/preschool fee subsidies.

6.4 Time spent in care/attendance

Introduction

Recording the amount of time children spend in care is necessary in order to provide information on the use of services and for planning purposes. A distinction may be made between time *used* and time *paid for*. Hours *paid* (or *booked*) may differ from hours *used* (or *attended*) for a number of reasons. For example, parents are generally required to book into a service for a period of time, such as half a day or a day, and pay for that period, even though the child may not attend for the whole of this period (hours *paid* are thus usually the same as hours *booked*).

The time children are in care (*used* or *booked*) may be assessed in a number of ways: the number of hours per day or per week, the number of days per week, the number of sessions per week, or an average number of hours per day or per week.

Questions on time used and time paid for may be dependant upon the service type. For instance, services operating on a sessional basis such as preschools may record time used or paid for on a sessional basis, while services such as long day care centres may record attendance in hours and/or days.

All of the questionnaires for the services included in the CP Census asked for information regarding the amount of time the child spent in care during the reference week. In addition, questionnaires for long day care services asked for the number of paid (booked) hours of care for each child. The ABS survey sought information on the time children spent in formal and informal care in the week preceding the survey; no information was sought on time spent in vacation care. In South Australia, questionnaires for all service types (apart from family day care) elicited information on the time children used care. Questionnaires for occasional care services in Victoria obtained details on children's attendances and sessions, while forms for TAFE child care centres in Victoria recorded children's bookings.

Description of questions

Hours used

CP Census

The CP Census questionnaires for long day care services and occasional care centres contained a question asking respondents to record each child's '*actual* hours of attendance' during the reference week; if a child was absent that week, but the place was paid for, respondents were instructed to record a zero. Family day care questionnaires had an

additional two-part question, asking if any hours of care were overnight (i.e. 8 p.m.–6 a.m.), and if so, to show *actual* hours overnight.

Before/after school care service providers were asked the number of days and the *actual* hours each child attended in the reference week, for before school care and for after school care separately. Pupil free days were to be included as after school care. Vacation care providers were simply asked the number of days each child attended in the reference week.

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Survey collected information on hours attended and days of attendance for all formal and informal child care services *used* in the reference week. Parents were asked a sequence of questions about their child's attendance. Two questions were asked for each service type; types of care included were long day care centres, preschool, family day care, occasional care, before/after school care, 'other' formal care and four types of informal care (no questions on time in care were included if the informal care used was 'other organisation' or 'child looked after self'). For each service type and for informal care, parents were asked for the day/s of the week and the number of hours on each of those days that the child attended the service or was in care. Where before/after school care was used, parents were also asked if the child attended in the mornings only, the afternoons only, or both in the mornings and afternoons. Another question was included for each type of informal care, which applied only if the child was in informal care on a weekday. Parents were asked if the care was provided before school hours; during school hours; after school but before 6.30 p.m.; and/or after 6.30 p.m.

South Australia

The South Australian census collected information on time *used*/attendance. Questions for long day care centres, TAFE child care services and integrated services centres were similar in that total hours of care *used* by each child, for each day of the reference week, was recorded. For each child attending integrated services centres, the response was divided into hours in preschool and hours in child care.

The questionnaire for preschool services contained a question in the 'child details' section asking for the number of preschool or pre-entry sessions attended in the reference week.

Questions regarding children's hours of attendance for outside school hours care and occasional care related to aggregate use rather than information for each individual child. For outside school hours care, the questions applied to the 'average daily attendance' for the reference week and children's 'patterns of attendance'. The average daily attendance question required respondents to 'add daily attendance together and divide by the number of operating days'. The question 'pattern of attendance over [the] reference week', required totals for the 'number of children who attended on a full-time basis', and 'number of children who attended on a casual basis'. Full-time attendance was defined as 'a child whose arrival and pattern of attendance may be anticipated'. 'Casual attendance' was defined as 'any other type of attendance, where a pattern of attendance has not yet been established'.

The occasional care questionnaire and the occasional care component of the preschool services questionnaire asked for information on the number of children, according to age group, who attended either less than or more than a nominated number of hours in the reference week – the number of nominated hours was '3' for occasional care services and '8' for occasional care services in preschools.

Victoria

The occasional care services questionnaire for Victoria contained a table in which service providers were asked to report the *attendance* and the sessions each week for the year 5 July 1996 to 27 June 1997. For each week and for the two service types separately (TAB and ACFE), the total weekly attendances (defined as 'the sum of all children attending each session in that week'), number of sessions and session length were to be recorded.

Hours paid

CP Census

Questionnaires for long day care services included a question asking respondents to record for each child the number of hours *paid* during the census week. Respondents were instructed to 'include allowable absences' (with this being defined in a subsequent section of the questionnaire as '... a period of absence when the child would normally be in care, and [Childcare Assistance] is paid e.g. sick, vacation, other').

Victoria

In the Victorian data collection, service providers at TAFE child care centres were required to complete data collection sheets included in the questionnaire, and to enter their records of *bookings* for each day Monday through Friday for Terms 1 and 2. The number of bookings were recorded each day and were split into the number of full day bookings and the number of half day bookings. Evening bookings were included as half days. Absent children were counted if their booking was paid or was expected to be paid for.

Discussion

Hours used

There was great variation between data collections in methods of recording time spent in care. Among collections where individual information was obtained for each child, the CP Census requested *actual* hours of attendance and number of days attended. Hours were recorded as a total for the week, not as hours for each day, such as in the ABS and South Australian collections. The ABS survey measured *attendance* at formal care and whether the child was *looked after* by an informal care provider in hours on each day of the preceding survey week. Questions used in South Australia were similar to the ABS in that for each child they counted hours each day of the week used, but the question was worded 'hours used'. The preschool form contained a question for each individual child on the number of sessions attended in the reference week, but the session length could be inferred only from the service's hours of operation.

Where information was obtained on an aggregate level in the South Australian collections, the occasional care questionnaire recorded total hours *attended* in the reference week, while the outside school hours care questionnaires asked for the *average daily attendance*, and the number of children attending on either a casual or full-time basis (with specific definitions for each). Total weekly *attendances*, *number of sessions*, and *session length* were counted in the Victorian occasional care questionnaire, which enabled the calculation of total hours attended by all children using the service.

Hours paid

While the CP Census counted the number of hours *paid* for each child (for long day care centres and family day care), TAFE child care centres in Victoria recorded aggregate *bookings*, defined as 'where payment has been made or is expected to be made regardless of attendance', in full days and half days. The approach used in the CP Census, collecting actual hours of attendance plus hours paid, allows comparison of the number of hours paid and hours used, and is important for policy purposes.

Other data collections/definitions

New South Wales

The New South Wales data collection collected aggregate data on 'time spent in care' using the following questions:

'Please specify the number of times each individual child attended during the representative week' according to the categories 'no. of children': 'once in the week'; 'twice in the week'; 'three times in the week'; 'four times in the week'; 'five times in the week'.

'Please specify as close as possible the number of individual children attending (exclude those booked or enrolled who did not attend) during the reference week according to the following time patterns' according to the categories 'number of children attending for: less than 3 hours a week; 3 to (less than) 6 hours per week; 6 to (less than) 12 hours per week; 12 to (less than) 20 hours per week; more than 20 hours per week.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision includes a descriptive indicator 'average hours of attendance by service type', intended to be an indicator of utilisation. This indicator however, measures the average number of hours *used* per child in the reference period (see Section 8.3: Utilisation/Vacancies). The definition provided ('total hours of attendance...divided by the total number of children using that service type in the sample week') does not specify the inclusion or otherwise of hours where a child is absent but the place is paid for.

Conclusion

Jurisdictions should consider whether they require information on time spent in care (time used) or time *paid/booked*, or both, as these represent two different data elements. These measures should be unambiguously defined.

Different units of time may be suited to different service types, for example, services operating in a sessional format, such as preschools, may wish to record time used or paid for in care on a sessional rather than hourly basis. Nevertheless, it is recommended that whichever unit of time is chosen, supporting information should be included to convert time into hours.

The type of data collection, that is, whether data are recorded on individual children or aggregated for all children, will also affect the way this information is collected. If data are collected on individual children, it is recommended that for each child the hours spent in care (hours used/attended) are recorded for each day of the census week. Thus, if a child spends 20 hours a week in care, for instance, it would be possible to determine whether the child spent a small number of 'long' days in care, or a larger number of 'short' days in care.

If the information is to be collected on an aggregate basis, it will be necessary to determine for each service type the ranges of hours to be used.

7 Data items: other characteristics of workers

7.1 Employment status

Introduction

The CP Census and the South Australian census both asked questions about the employment status of staff, for instance, in relation to paid staff, whether they were employed full-time or part-time. These questions need to be examined in conjunction with the instructions regarding the scope of the data collection in relation to the worker population (see Section 3.3).

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Census for all services contained a question on the 'employment status' of 'staff and unpaid workers'. Respondents were asked to report the 'employment status' of their staff and unpaid workers in terms of four options – paid full-time, paid part-time, paid casual and unpaid. 'Students on work experience', 'volunteers' and 'work trainees' were included as examples of 'unpaid workers' for all service types, with the addition of 'parents' for all services except family day care, and 'family members' for long day care centres. Respondents in long day care centres were instructed to include owner/managers working at the centre and drawing a salary/profit in one of the 'paid' categories; otherwise they were to be included in the unpaid category. (The staff identification question instructed respondents to exclude owner/managers not working at the centre.)

The question on 'work status' of caregivers in family day care schemes was somewhat different from the question for other workers, given that family day care providers are all paid and that the majority are considered to be self-employed contractors (DHFS 1997c). 'Work status during [census week]' was to be reported according to three categories: 'regular caregiver for the whole week'; 'regular caregiver for part of the week e.g. worked 3 days'; and 'relief caregiver'.

South Australia

The South Australian census sought information on the employment status of staff in all service types, except occasional care. The collection for preschool services had two questions on the employment status of staff. The first question, 'staff status', had the options 'permanent employee', 'contract employee', 'casual' or 'other'. This was followed by a question 'If part-time, proportion of full-time hours worked', with '0.6' as an example.

The questionnaires for the other service types obtained information only on whether workers were 'Full or part-time employed', with the options 'F (full-time)' and 'P (part-time)'. For long day care centres, TAFE child care centres and integrated services centres 'full-time/part-time employed' was defined as 'describes a staff member who works either the total number of hours per week or less than the total numbers of hours as prescribed in

the award or industrial agreement under which he/she is employed'. The questionnaires for outside school hours care services defined 'full-time' as 'person works all hours that this program operates' and 'part-time' as 'person works less than total hours this program operates'. For workers in family day care schemes only, the question 'full- or part-time employed' was followed by a second question 'if part-time, proportion of full-time hours worked for Family Day Care Service only'.

Discussion

While the categories used in the CP question for 'staff and unpaid' workers are not defined in the questionnaire, the department has extensively tested these categories and is confident that respondents are not confused by these terms. It appears that 'paid full-time' and 'paid part-time' workers have permanent status or are on a contract; 'paid full-time' workers are employed to work 35 or more hours per week, 'paid part-time' workers to work less than 35 hours per week. The question for family day care providers defined full-time/part-time as 'worked for the whole week/worked for part of the week e.g. worked 3 days'.

Although the South Australian preschool questionnaire did not define the terms 'permanent', 'contract' or 'casual', preschool teachers are employed by the department (DETE) responsible for the data collection, and these terms may be well understood by respondents. However, the new industrial relations framework means that the term 'contract' and 'contractor', and the types and numbers of workers employed under contract is in a state of change.

The CP employment status question includes 'casual' and 'unpaid', but in South Australia these categories of staff are excluded from the data collection for preschool services, long day care centres, integrated services, TAFE child care centres and family day care services (see Section 7.2). 'Relief' staff are included in the data collection for outside school hours care services only if they worked 'the full reference week'.

Unlike the CP Census, the South Australian data collection does not seek any information on the characteristics of family day care providers.

In the South Australian census the definition of 'full-time/part-time' varied by service type. For long day care centres, TAFE child care centres and integrated services centres, 'full-time' was defined according to the relevant award or industrial agreement. For outside school hours care, on the other hand, where there may not have been a specific award or industrial agreement, 'full-time' was defined as being employed for the entire time that the service operated. Although 'full-time' was not defined in the preschool questionnaire, the department (as the employer) may employ staff full-time according to the hours specified in the relevant award or industrial agreement. In the South Australian forms, 'part-time' was defined as working fewer hours than 'full-time', with forms for some service types asking for the proportion of full-time hours worked by part-time workers.

Other data collections/definitions

Australian Bureau of Statistics

ABS definitions are developed to define groups of employees in the Australian labour force. These definitions need development to translate to the children's services industry as workers may work in more than one position, and in non-children's services employers.

According to the ABS Labour Force publication, an 'employee is a person who works for a public or private employer and receives remuneration in wages, salary, a retainer fee by their employer while working on a commission basis, tips, piece-rates or payment in kind, or a person who operates his or her own incorporated enterprise without hiring employees'. An 'employer is a person who operates his or her own unincorporated economic enterprise or engages independently in a profession or trade, and hires one or more employees' (ABS 1999).

The ABS Labour Force publication defines 'full-time workers' as 'Employed persons who usually worked 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs) and others who, although usually working less than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week'. 'Part-time workers' are defined as 'Employed persons who usually worked less than 35 hours a week and who did so during the reference week' (ABS 1999).

The 1998 Employee Earnings and Hours publication, however, defined 'full-time employees' as follows: 'permanent, temporary and casual employees who usually work the agreed or award hours for a full-time employee in their occupation and received pay for any part of the reference period. If agreed or award hours do not apply, employees are regarded as full-time if they usually work 35 hours or more per week. Casual employees are classified as full-time (or part-time) according to the hours worked in the reference week. 'Part-time employees are those who are not full-time as defined' (ABS 1998d). 'Permanent employees are entitled to be paid annual leave', while 'casual employees usually receive a higher rate of pay, to compensate for lack of permanency and leave entitlements'.

National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0

The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0* notes that 'full-time' can be defined in terms of various numbers of hours (35, 37.5, 40) (see Section 5.12).

The dictionary data element 'full-time equivalent staff' defines 'full-time' according to conditions under an award, and 'part-time' as some proportion of the relevant 'full-time' hours. 'Full-time equivalent staff units' are defined as 'the on-job hours paid for (including overtime) and hours of paid leave of any type for a staff member (or contract employee where applicable) divided by the number of ordinary time hours normally paid for a full-time staff member when on the job (or contract employee where applicable) under the relevant award or agreement for the staff member (or contract employee occupation where applicable). Hours of unpaid leave are to be excluded'. An example is given as follows – 'If under the relevant award or agreement a full-time nurse is paid for an 80 (ordinary time) hour fortnight, the full-time equivalent for a part-time nurse who works 64 hours is 0.8' (AIHW 1998b:203).

As with the South Australian definition, this definition will only be useful for children's services data where staff are paid under awards or agreements.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

One of the descriptive indicators of the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision includes information on the employment status of workers in children's services. The indicator DJ Total Staff is defined as 'Total labour involved in providing child care and preschool services in the sample week expressed in term of (DJ1) full-time equivalents (FTE) staff and (DJ2) number of people employed. ...Data for child care and preschools should be presented separately, with labour being divided into (four categories as follows):

(DJ1) Total full-time equivalent paid employees (note: exclude Family Day Carers as they are to be included in DJ3)

(DJ2) Total paid employees

(DJ3) Total Family Day Carers (i.e. Full-time equivalent carers employed as employees and full-time equivalent carers employed as contractors)

(DJ4) Total unpaid staff'

'Full-time equivalent staff numbers' is defined in the data manual as 'total number of hours worked per week by all staff divided by number of hours in standard working week'. The term 'standard working week' is not defined.

The definition of this indicator is confusing since it states that 'Total labour ...is expressed in terms of (DJ1) and (DJ2)', yet the data manual asks for the data to be presented in terms of the four main categories.

Conclusion

The definition of 'employment status' is clearly dependent on decisions about the scope of the collection in relation to child care workers.

If 'unpaid workers' are to be included in the data collection, there is a strong case for collecting information on whether workers are 'paid' or 'unpaid' given the interest in the extent of unpaid resources used to provide community services in general, particularly in an environment of contracting out of service provision.

Information on the status of workers (as either full-time or part-time) could be collected for paid workers only. Definitions of 'full-time employee' and 'part-time employee' will need to be developed to take account of workers in outside school hours care services and family day care services.

While not recommended for collection in a minimum data set due to definitional issues and respondent burden, information on the basis of employment (whether on contract, permanent or casual) could be collected for all paid employees. If this level of detail is required, then an approach such as that used in the CP Census could be adopted, provided that definitions are given for the various categories used.

7.2 Type of work performed/job description

Introduction

This item identifies the type of work performed by children's services workers, rather than position held. Collecting information on this data item is useful in order to compare type of work performed to worker's qualification status.

The CP Census and the South Australian collection obtained information on the type of work performed by children's services workers in all service types, except for family day caregivers, whose main activity can be assumed to be working with the children in their care, rather than undertaking administrative or other tasks.

Description of questions

CP Census

CP Census questionnaires for long day care centres, outside school hours care and occasional care contained a question for each worker on the 'major type of work' performed. Three classifications were provided: 'Direct contact with children'; 'Administrative/co-ordination tasks'; and 'Other tasks e.g. cleaning, cooking, maintenance (excluding contractors)'. Accompanying instructions were to select one classification only and to choose categories on the basis of which activity involved most of the worker's time.

The questions for workers in family day care coordination units asked respondents to estimate separately for each worker the proportion of time spent on administrative tasks and on client/carer support. For 'administrative tasks' respondents were instructed to include 'clerical, budgets, admin. of Childcare Assistance, reporting to Dept., insurance, recruitment field worker writing reports'. For 'client/carer support' they were instructed to include 'homevisiting, playgroups, networks, toy library, ascertaining clients needs, placement of children, travel time'.

South Australia

Questions asked in the South Australian collection were framed in terms of each worker's 'employment category'. These were distinct from questions on 'industrial classification', which were also included for some service types. In the South Australian questionnaires, 'employment category' related to the *nature* of the work performed by a worker while 'industrial classification' was defined as the 'classification under which a worker is paid in accordance with an industrial award or agreement'. Instructions were included on forms for all services except preschool services and family day care, explaining that the question on employment category related to the nature of work performed. A list of between 6-14 classifications (depending on the service type) was supplied. The list of classifications for long day care centres and TAFE child care centres for instance, was as follows: coordinator; trained/qualified child care worker; untrained/unqualified child care worker; admin/clerical assistant; cook; other. Up to two responses per worker were allowed on forms for integrated services centres, family day care and before/after school care.

Discussion

The use of the word 'employment' in the South Australian collection implies the question is about employees, or paid workers. This may be problematic for occasional care services, since the collection included volunteers who were part of the 'staff team'. For all other service types, only paid workers were included.

Classifications of the type of work performed varied in detail between the CP and South Australian collections. While the CP Census used the same three classifications for all service types except family day care, questions in the South Australian collection had from 6-14 classifications, depending on the service type. Classifications in the South Australian collection were in the style of job titles (e.g. 'Trained/qualified child care worker') rather than a description of the type of work performed such as in the CP Census (e.g. 'direct contact with children'). Therefore, for some classifications in the South Australian questionnaires (such as 'coordinator'), it is unclear whether the worker would mainly work in contact with children.

Difficulties arise in collecting information on the major type of work performed when workers are involved, sometimes equally, in more than one task. Two methods were used to tackle this problem in the data collections under review: asking for the proportion of worker's time spent on two possible tasks (for family day care coordination unit staff in the CP Census); and recording up to two different employment categories (such as in some of the questionnaires in the South Australian collection).

Other data collections/definitions

National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0

The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0* defines the data element 'Principal role of health professional' as 'that in which the person usually works the most hours each week'. Nine classifications are provided, with further disaggregation of these possible (AIHW 1998b:66-67). Classifications are in the style of job titles as in the South Australian children's services collection.

Conclusion

Information on the type of work performed, such as collected in the CP Census, is more useful in a national minimum data set than information on worker's job title.

If the main purpose of the question is to indicate the proportion of workers in direct contact with children, a question and classification similar to that of the CP Census is simple and covers workers in most service types. Jurisdictions may then investigate the qualification status of primary contact workers as against those undertaking managerial and administrative tasks. Workers at family day care coordination units may require different and additional classifications. All classifications should be clearly defined.

The importance of collecting information on workers involved in 'other' tasks (such as food preparation and cleaning) should also be ascertained. It may or may not be necessary to disaggregate workers according to task within that category.

If jurisdictions require information on multiple tasks performed by workers, the method used in the CP Census question for family day care coordination unit workers is useful, as it specifies the proportion of the worker's time spent on each activity. It should be noted, however, that calculating more than two proportions has not been well received in CP Census testing procedures (FaCS pers. comm.).

If jurisdictions want to collect detailed classifications of the type of work performed, the classifications should be designed so as to be easily collapsed into the categories specified in a national minimum data set.

7.3 Hours worked

Introduction

Collecting information on hours worked by children's services workers is useful in determining the total resources (labour) used to provide a service, working conditions, and other labour-force related matters. Hours worked may be measured by the number of hours

per day or per week, number of days per week, or actual or average hours worked per day or week.

One question regarding hours worked in the reference week was included for workers in each service type in the CP Census. In the South Australian collection, questionnaires for all service types except outside school hours care contained a question on hours worked by children's services workers, while in Victoria, this type of question was included only in the preschool form.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Census of long day care centres, family day care (coordination unit staff and unpaid workers), outside school hours care services and occasional care centres contained a question on the hours worked in the reference week by each staff member and unpaid worker. Respondents were instructed to 'include hours worked for this service only' and (for all services except occasional care) 'exclude time away e.g. sick, recreation leave, rostered days off'. Family day care providers were to record *actual* hours worked in the reference week, with detailed instructions for calculating these hours.

South Australia

The South Australian collection obtained information on hours worked for part-time workers only. Questionnaires for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, preschool services, integrated services centres, family day care and occasional care services contained a question to determine full-time equivalent units: 'if part-time, proportion of full-time hours worked' (in the reference week). The question for family day care carried the instruction '...for FDC service only'. The question for integrated services centres allowed up to two responses, corresponding to the two possible responses to the preceding question on 'employment category'.

Victoria

The questionnaire for preschools in Victoria requested respondents to record total teaching hours and total non-teaching hours separately for teachers and for assistants. Respondents were instructed to record the number of hours in the census week staff were *employed* to operate the funded preschool program only, and not to include time spent on other programs or 'on call' time for assistants.

Discussion

The data item 'hours worked by children's services workers' was recorded in a different way in each data collection.

In the CP Census, staff and unpaid workers in all service types were asked for the 'hours worked' in the reference week. Family day care providers were to record their *actual* hours worked in the reference week, defined as the total time with at least one child in their care.

In the CP Census, hours worked were not classified according to whether they were hours in which workers had contact with children, whereas for preschools in Victoria teaching time was recorded separately from non-teaching time.

The hours workers were *employed* was collected in Victoria, rather than simply hours worked. Therefore any difference between hours *worked* and hours workers were *employed* was not accounted for.

The method used in the South Australian collection of asking respondents to record, for part-time workers, the proportion of full-time hours worked (FTE) provided more approximate data. This approach was problematic since no definition of a full-time week of work was provided.

All the questions examined have restricted the concept of 'hours worked' by children's services workers to the time actually spent at the place where the care or activity occurs, with the exception of family day care providers where 'hours worked' is assumed to be equivalent to the time a worker has at least one child in their care. It is important to recognise that this approach may not account for all of the hours worked by children's services workers, particularly in the case of family day care providers. For example, time taken for in-service training may be included as time worked for long day care centre workers (since it may be conducted at their place of work). This will not be the case for family day care providers, because in-service training is likely to take place elsewhere than their home (where family day care is provided).

Other data collections/definitions

National Health Data Dictionary Version 7.0

The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* states that there are inherent problems in asking for information on number of hours usually worked in a week by health professionals (AIHW 1998b:265-271). These include differing definitions of what activities to include and exclude, and successfully communicating the definitions to respondents. The dictionary contains three relevant data elements: hours worked by health professional; hours worked by medical practitioner in direct patient care; and total hours worked by a medical practitioner.

Conclusion

In relation to the general question on hours worked, jurisdictions should decide whether they require information on paid and/or unpaid hours; hours actually worked and/or hours usually worked; hours in contact with children and/or non-contact hours. Clear definitions of these concepts should be provided.

It is suggested that more consideration should be given to methods used to obtain data on hours worked by family day care providers. Consultation on this topic with family day care providers may be useful.

If data on FTE are required, there is also the issue of whether it is appropriate to make respondents calculate FTE, such as in the South Australian collection, or for respondents to report total hours worked and FTE then calculated from these data. If respondents are to calculate FTE themselves, a definition of a full-time week of work should be provided on the questionnaire.

7.4 Qualifications

Introduction

Staff qualifications have been found to be positively related to the quality of child care services (Ochiltree 1994); the proportions of staff with recognised qualifications can thus be used as an indicator of quality of care provided. State and Territory governments recognise a range of qualifications relevant to the field of child care, and have established, for long day care centres at least, certain regulations regarding the number of staff who must hold certain types of qualifications (McNeice et al. 1995:21). Questions on qualifications of children's services workers were included for all service types in the CP Census and South Australian collection.

Description of questions

CP Census

Respondents to the CP Census were asked to indicate the specific type or types of qualifications held by each worker, with a list of 10 options relevant to the type of care provided. Lists differed between the various service types, with classifications for family day care providers, before/after school care workers and vacation care workers including qualifications relevant to the operation of that service type. The CP Census definition of relevant qualifications included courses of study related to early childhood and primary teaching, child care, nursing, accountancy, psychology, social work and business management. Options relating to experience in the field ('more than three years') and to current study status ('currently undertaking relevant qualifications') were also included. The possibility of selecting more than one option was also available.

South Australia

A similar format was used in the South Australian collection. Respondents were instructed to indicate the '*most relevant* qualification' for workers in vacation care and occasional care services, and the '*most relevant approved* qualification' plus '*other relevant* qualification' for workers in all other service types. A long detailed list of responses (around 25 classifications, depending on service type) was provided for this question. The list included a 'currently undertaking relevant qualifications' option, but no option for experience in the field. Questionnaires for all service types, apart from family day care, included up to two separate questions on worker's relevant work experience.

Discussion

One of the differences between the two data collections under review concerns the language of the question: the CP Census asks for 'qualifications/experience', while the South Australian collection asks for '*most relevant* qualification' for some service types, and '*most relevant approved* qualification' plus '*other relevant* qualification' for others. The wording used in the CP collection indicates that the question relates to information on qualifications and/or experience, and the wording in the South Australian collection indicates the question relates to qualifications only. An additional one to two questions on relevant work

experience in children's services were included for workers in some service types in the South Australian collection.

The questions in the South Australian collection specified the most *relevant* or most *relevant approved* qualification(s), prompting respondents to include only those qualifications relevant to working in the children's services field. No explanation or definition of 'approved qualification' was provided. The CP collection included what it considered to be relevant qualifications in its much shorter list of classifications.

Several workers are likely to have more than one relevant qualification. This is especially true if work experience in the relevant field is included in the classification of qualifications, as in the CP Census question. In the South Australian collection, generally up to two responses were allowed per worker, while in the CP Census, an unlimited number of responses were allowed for each worker, although only three responses were coded in the data set. Therefore, workers with more than two relevant qualifications (or those studying for a relevant qualification while at the same time having more than one relevant qualification) may not have their extra qualifications counted in the South Australian collection.

The list of classifications for all services in the CP Census included a category 'None of the above' and in South Australia in all services 'no formal child care/educational qualifications'. Some classifications used for qualifications in the two data collections under review were relatively similar, with categories in the South Australian collection resembling an expanded and more detailed list of the CP Census classifications. For example, the category 'nursing (including mothercraft)', a classification in questions in the CP collection, was matched by three categories: 'mothercraft', 'registered nurse' and 'other nurse' in the South Australian collection. However, questions in the South Australian collection also contained categories not listed in the CP questionnaires, such as 'overseas child care qualification' and 'partial completion of an above qualification'.

Other data collections/definitions

ABS Standard Classification of Qualifications

The ABS Standard Classification of Qualifications (ABSCQ), released in 1993, currently uses two elements relating to educational qualifications: level of attainment and field of study. These can be used separately or in combination (ABS 1993b). Changes in the areas of education and training, particularly in the vocational education and training sector, and the release of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in January 1995, have impacted on the usefulness of the ABSCQ.

The ABSCQ is presently under review by the ABS, and an Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED) is anticipated to be implemented in ABS administrative collections in 2001 (ABS pers. comun. 1999).

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision includes a descriptive indicator 'qualifications and experience of primary contact staff'. This element (which is really two elements) is defined as 'the number of paid primary contact staff falling into each of the below categories divided by total of primary contact staff'.

1. Proportion of total paid primary contact staff with a relevant formal qualification

- Total number of paid primary contact staff with a relevant formal qualification
 - Total paid primary contact staff
2. Proportion of total paid primary contact staff without a relevant formal qualification
- Total number of paid primary contact staff without a relevant formal qualification but with the equivalent of three years or more full-time experience in a preschool and/or child care service
 - Total paid primary contact staff
 - Total number of paid primary contact staff without a relevant formal qualification and with fewer than three years full-time experience in a preschool and/or child care service
 - Total paid primary contact staff

The 'formal qualifications' for this indicator include: early childhood related teaching degree (3 or 4 years); child care certificate or associate diploma (2 years); other relevant qualifications--primary teaching, nursing (including mothercraft nursing); basic child care certificate (1 year); diploma or degree in child care (3 years or more); other teaching, psychology and social work.

This descriptive indicator only covers the qualifications and experience of *paid* workers in *primary contact with children*. Therefore the qualifications of unpaid workers and paid workers not in direct contact with children are not recorded. Hence, it is possible that workers such as directors would not have their qualifications recorded.

ABS Census of Population and Housing

There were five questions in the 1996 ABS Census of Population and Housing regarding person's qualifications. These included questions on the completion of post-school qualifications, the highest level of qualification; field of study; institution at which completed and year completed.

Conclusion

Jurisdictions should determine whether they require information on worker's experience in the child care field in addition to information on qualifications. If so, questions on qualifications and experience should be asked separately.

For consistency purposes, jurisdictions should develop a common list of relevant qualifications for each specific service type.

Another decision to be made by jurisdictions concerns the range of qualifications to include. All qualifications of workers may be collected, or only those qualifications considered 'most relevant' to working in the field of children's services. If information on all qualifications of workers is required, a 'currently undertaking qualifications' option may be included in the classifications, whereas if only 'most relevant' qualifications are needed, a separate question regarding current study is more appropriate.

If jurisdictions are prepared to collect detailed classifications of worker's qualifications, the classifications should be designed to map to the categories of the (forthcoming) ASCED.

7.5 In-service training

Introduction

Information on in-service training is part of information collected to monitor characteristics of the children's services workforce. In-service training refers to structured training sessions undertaken by workers to improve and update their skills. The National Child Care Accreditation Council states, in its handbook, that well-trained staff deliver care that 'enhances the development of children than does the care delivered by untrained staff' (NCAC 1993). Furthermore, ongoing in-service training for child care workers ensures they receive 'up-to-date knowledge and understanding about the development of children'.

Details of in-service training courses undertaken by staff were collected for all children's services included in the CP Census, with the exception of vacation care. In family day care, the information was collected for both caregivers and coordination unit workers. Forms for long day care centres, preschool services, TAFE child care centres, integrated services centres and family day care services in the South Australian collection contained a related question on worker's 'additional skills'.

Description of questions

CP Census

The same question was asked of workers in all service types included in the CP Census (except vacation care). The question asked if each worker had undertaken a specific type of in-service training within the previous 12 months using a list that included various courses such as child care in general; care for children with special needs; management or financial training; and first aid training. Respondents were able to select more than one option.

South Australia

A question on 'additional skills' was asked for workers in selected services in the South Australian collection. 'Additional skills' were defined in the questionnaire as 'a significant skill, knowledge or understanding that a staff member may possess in addition to his/her qualifications; e.g. a language other than English or experience in a particular culture, or experience in working with children with special needs, e.g. physical disability or *in-service training*'. The list of coded responses included sign language; Aboriginal culture; music skills; special needs skills; bilingual; protective behaviour training skills; counselling skills; integration of children with disabilities; management skills and 'other'. Up to two skills could be recorded.

Discussion

While the CP Census question related directly to in-service training undertaken in the previous 12 months, the question in the South Australian collection was about worker's 'additional skills', which may or may not include in-service training. It is not possible to ascertain from the question used by South Australia whether workers had performed in-service training or whether they simply had 'additional skills'. For example, a worker with counselling skills may have a qualification in counselling, or they may have completed an in-service training course in counselling.

Neither question in the collections under review gave an indication of the extent of training. There was also no specific classification in either question relating to training in the area of children's development.

Other data collections/definitions

A different approach to this topic was used in the New South Wales data collection. The question was asked from the point of view of service providers rather than individual workers. Service providers were required to complete 'representative week questions' and an 'annual service plan'. The 'representative week questions' included a set of open-ended questions relating to the service in the previous 12 months. Examples of these questions were: 'How were the needs of children of non-English-speaking background met?' and 'How were the needs of children with a disability met?' One possible response to the questions may have been that staff members undertook in-service training to improve and/or update their skills and knowledge in these areas. A following section in the questionnaire, 'annual service plan', contained an open-ended question on the service's proposed workplan, with 'Training for staff' given as an example of a strategy to achieve objectives in the plan.

Conclusion

Jurisdictions should determine what information they need about worker's in-service training. If unit record information is required, is it necessary to know the extent of the training for each worker?, or how recently it has been undertaken?

It is not recommended that in-service training be included in a question on 'additional skills' of workers, unless it is possible to distinguish between those skills gained from in-service training and skills gained elsewhere.

Classifications of types of in-service training may need to be modified for different service types.

8 Data items: characteristics of service providers

8.1 Availability of service (time)

Introduction

An important measure of the availability of a particular service to current and potential users of the service is the amount of *time* that the provider actually provides the service. Geographic *location* is another aspect of availability but the definition used here is restricted to *time*. Availability in terms of *time* can be measured in three ways: the number of weeks in a year the service operates, the number of days in a week the service operates and the number of hours in a week that it operates.

Questions about how many weeks in a year a provider offers the service are dependent upon the type of the service. Long day care services are expected (as a condition of CP funding) to operate for a minimum of 48 weeks per year, while before/after school care services operate only during school terms, usually 40-42 weeks per year, and vacation care services during school holiday periods, about 10-12 weeks per year.

Questions about how many days and hours per week the service is provided are also dependent upon the type of the service. Services that are funded to provide 'work-related care' need to have days and hours of operation that will cover the time that parents are at work. For instance, long day care services (long day care centres and family day care), which are targeted at children under school age, are required (as a condition of CP funding) to operate for at least 8 continuous hours per day on normal working days. Occasional care centres, on the other hand, may have shorter hours and may not operate on every working day, as they are designed to provide shorter periods of care for non-work-related reasons.

Questions on hours of operation are not collected for family day care services, perhaps because each individual provider has unique arrangements to care for each child. Information is collected elsewhere on 'hours worked' by the workers in children's services, including family day care providers (see Section 7.3).

All of the CP Censuses except family day care included a question on weeks, days and hours of operation. Although only a few service types (long day care centres and integrated services centres) in South Australia were asked for information on weeks of operation, all except family day care were asked about days and hours of operation. In Victoria, information on days and hours of operation was sought from all service types except preschool, and information on weeks of operation was collected from all service types except preschool and before/after school care services.

Description of questions

CP Census

The questions in the CP Censuses on weeks of operation were of several types. For long day care centres, the question was 'How many weeks in a full year *is this service open?*' For before/after school care providers, it was 'How many weeks in a full year *will you provide [this form of] care?*' For vacation care and occasional care providers, it was 'How many weeks in a full year *do you expect this service to be available to children?*' The questions on days and hours were in two parts. First, respondents were asked, 'Is this service *open* during the same hours Monday to Friday?' Those who said 'Yes' were then asked to state the actual time the service opened and the actual time it closed. If not, they were asked to indicate the opening time for each day of the week, from Monday to Sunday for long day care centres, or from Monday to Friday for other services (outside school hours care and occasional care). An example of how to fill in the times correctly was given for each service type.

South Australia

The South Australian censuses used the following question for weeks: 'How many weeks was a child care service *available* to children during the 12 months preceding the reference week?' Information on days and hours of operation was obtained in several ways. For long day care centres, integrated services centres, TAFE child care centres and preschools, the question was 'Usual hours a child care service is *available to children*'. For outside school hours care services and occasional care services, the question was 'Hours *open for operation* of this program'. In all collections, respondents were instructed to 'Complete the following table—use a 24 hour clock'. The table had cells for 'start' and 'end' for each day of the week, Monday to Sunday, with examples given, for instance, '0800 (start)' and '1800 (end)'. The questionnaires for preschool, before/after school hours care and occasional care services allowed for two sets of 'start' and 'end', for instance, '0900 (start)', '1130 (end)', '1245 (start)' and '1545 (end)'.

Victoria

In Victoria, information on weeks was obtained from TAFE child care centres by asking for the 'number of weeks per year that the service *operates*'. Providers of occasional care services were not asked directly for the number of weeks they operated, but this information could be derived from the 'attendances and sessions' part of the form, as providers were asked to show for each week of the financial year the number of attendances and number of sessions.

The Victorian data collection for TAFE child care centres, outside school hours care services and occasional care services had questions concerning days and hours of operation, but the form of the questions differed between these service types.

- TAFE child care centres. Respondents were asked to provide 'hours of operation' and the number of 'hours per day/evening' that the service operated and also the 'number of days/evenings per week' the service operated. There was no provision to provide information for each day of the week, that is, it was assumed that the hours were standard throughout the week.
- Outside school hours care services. The forms for this group of providers had a section on hours of operation for each of the three types of service provided. In each section the respondents were asked to tick a box indicating the 'hours operated per day', with four possibilities for before school care, three for after school care, and eight for vacation care.

There was no provision to give different times for different days. Before/after school care providers were asked for 'number of pupil free days operated' and vacation care providers for 'number of vacation care days operated in the calendar year for each of the four holiday periods.

- Occasional care services. For each week of the 1996-97 financial year, respondents were asked to give the number of sessions and session length. If the centre had set hours, the respondents were to enter the number of hours. If the centre has sessions of varying length, the hours were to be averaged. If the centre had set times but not all children attended the full hours, the centre was asked to enter the hours the majority of the children attended.

The questionnaires for preschool services in Victoria did not have questions that dealt specifically with weeks or hours of operation. However, in the 'Staff' section of the questionnaires, respondents were asked to state the number of teaching and non-teaching hours of staff, and it may be that 'teaching hours' is synonymous with 'hours of operation' for this type of service.

Discussion

There were two issues regarding the questions used in 1996-97 to obtain information on weeks of operation:

- The first issue related to the differences between data collections in the words used to denote 'operation'. The CP Censuses had three different phrases: 'weeks the service is open', 'weeks care is provided', and 'weeks the service is available'. South Australia also used 'weeks the service is available', while Victoria used 'weeks the service operates'.
- The second issue related to the phrase 'number of weeks per year' and the differences between collections as to the meaning of 'year'. The CP used 'in a full year' (with instructions in some forms to assist providers who had been operating for less than a full year); South Australia used 'the 12 months preceding the reference week'; and Victoria used the previous financial year. It is not clear how a service that had operated for only part of the reference year would respond to the questions used in South Australia and Victoria.

Several approaches were taken by the various collections to obtain information on days and hours of operation. The CP Census questions asked what hours the service was open on each day of the week. Two questions were used for different service types in South Australia: one asked for the hours when the service was open for the operation of program, and the other asked for the hours when the service was available to children. The Victorian collection used the phrase *hours of operation* or *hours operated per day*.

It is not clear whether the phrases 'service is open', 'service is operating', 'service is available to children' and 'care is provided' are synonymous. It is possible that staff may be working at the facility at times when children are not being cared for, such as when staff are planning programs, preparing for children's arrival or consulting with parents. Is the service 'operating' if staff members are preparing for children's arrival at the service or packing away at the end of the day/session? Is the service 'open' if children are not being cared for, but staff are available for parent consultation?

In relation to hours of operation, the initial question used in the CP Census ('Is this service open the same hours from Monday to Friday') was confusing for some long day care centre providers who were open the same hours Monday to Friday, but different hours during the

weekend. It appears that these providers answered 'Yes' to this question and recorded these hours, but then failed to record their hours for the weekend.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

There is no data element 'weeks', 'days' or 'hours of operation' in the Data Collection Manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision. Information on 'hours of opening', however, is required for the performance indicator 'proportion of child care services providing non standard hours of care'.

New South Wales

The questions on weeks/days/hours of opening/operation used in the New South Wales data collection specify that weeks/days/hours are to be reported for the period 'when children are in attendance'. For instance, service providers were asked to specify the number of weeks the 'project' (service provider) was 'open for children to attend during this reporting period' with providers reporting 'number of weeks open per year'. Providers were then asked to specify the total number of hours per week and the total number of days per week that the project was open ('i.e. when children were in attendance during the representative week'). This was followed by 'Please specify the operational hours for the project for the representative week (i.e. when children will be in attendance)', with a box for 'opening times' and a box for 'closing times' for each day of the week (Monday to Sunday).

Queensland

The Queensland Child Care annual census form also had a series of questions on weeks/hours of opening. These questions distinguish between the hours that services operate (i.e. provide care for children) – 'what are your standard hours of operation' – and the hours that service providers are open for other purposes – 'if your office hours or inquiry times differ to hours of operation, please specify'.

Conclusion

Availability in terms of time needs to be defined to include weeks per year, days per week and hours per day. Obtaining this information in a data collection will therefore require more than one question, and will result in the inclusion of three data elements.

If the intention of the question on weeks, days and hours of operation is to measure the availability of the service to users, then the phrase '(time) service is provided for children' could be used or a phrase such as 'for children to attend' could be added to the words 'open' or 'operated'. This may be more appropriate for some service types than for others.

If the term 'year', as in 'how many weeks in a year', is used in the question, this needs to be clarified. The question could be phrased, for instance, as in the CP Census – 'How many weeks in a full year will you provide this service for children?'

In collecting 'days and hours care is provided' or 'days and hours of opening', a box for each 'start' time and a box for each 'end' time on each day of the week would provide the most accurate information.

8.2 Number of places/places by age

Introduction

Another measure of availability is service *capacity* or *size* in relation to a particular target population. Service capacity can be measured in terms of the individual service provider (such as a long day care centre), or in terms of part of the sector of the industry or the entire sector (that is, an aggregate of providers of the same service). In a 1996 Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services discussion paper, the availability (accessibility) of Commonwealth-funded long day care was measured by comparing long day care capacity within a statistical local government area with the number of children in the area who were in the target population for long day care (DHFS 1996c).

Service capacity is usually measured in terms of *places*. The term *place* can be defined as the unit of measurement for the *capacity of an individual service provider*. Thus, a provider's *number of licensed places* is equivalent to the maximum number of children the provider is licensed to have in care at a given time, while a provider's *number of approved places* is equivalent to the maximum number of children in care at a given time who are eligible to attract government funding.

In relation to long day care centres, there is often interest in monitoring the number of places allocated to children of different age groups, for instance, because of concerns about the supply of places for young children (often defined as children under 2 years of age).

Questions about 'places' were asked in the CP Censuses of long day care centres and family day care, and in all South Australian censuses except those for preschools, family day care and outside school hours care services. No questions on 'places' were asked in the Victorian data collections.

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Census of long day care centres had two questions on places. First, respondents were asked for 'the number of *licensed places*' at the centre. Respondents were then asked for the 'number of *places by age group*', with an instruction to 'show age groups in months and/or years for each room'. In most centres, children of different age groups are separated into different rooms, such as infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The CP Census of family day care had one question, directed to the coordination unit: 'What is your *approved EFT*?', with EFT being defined as 'equivalent full-time places'.

South Australia

The censuses in South Australia of long day care centres, integrated services centres, and TAFE child care centres asked respondents for their '*licensed/approved capacity*', with this figure to be broken down into '*children under 2 years*' and '*children 2 years and over*'. Occasional care services were asked for their '*capacity*—total number of *places available*', also broken down into two age groups of *children* (under 2 and 2 years and over). For all censuses, '*capacity*' was defined as 'the maximum number of children a provider is licensed or approved to have in care at a given time'.

Discussion

There are problems in the ways that information on 'number of places' was collected in 1997, since, where services are both licensed and funded, the number of *licensed* places may not be equivalent to the number of *approved* places. Some long day care centres, for instance, may have more *licensed* than *approved* places, because the Commonwealth Government has approved Childcare Assistance funding for a certain number of places, but the State or Territory Government has granted them a licence for places in excess of that number. In these circumstances, where providers are asked for 'number of approved/licensed places' or 'number of places', it is not clear which information they are required to provide.

In seeking information on 'number of places by age', it may be difficult to classify by specific age distributions, given different arrangements in operation between the various service providers. State and Territory regulations vary considerably, for instance, in the age categories they use when specifying staff-child ratios for centre-based child care (Moyle et al. 1996).

One problem with the use of 'places' as a measure of capacity is that the number of hours per week for which care is provided for the 'number of children who can be in care at any given time' (place) varies both between and within service types. Thus, a 'place' in long day care, for instance, is based on a different number of hours from a 'place' in after school care. Even within the same service type the number of hours of care/service provided can vary; for instance, while all Commonwealth-funded long day care centres are required to be open for at least 8 hours a day on normal working days, a substantial proportion are open for 11 or more hours a day. Thus, a long day care place in one long day care centre may represent 40 hours of care a week, while in another it may represent 55 hours of care per week. Similarly, the number of hours of preschool provided in the various jurisdictions varies considerably.

Other data collections/definitions

CP Family Day Care Handbook

While there is no definition of 'equivalent full-time place' in the CP family day care form, the *Commonwealth Family Day Care Handbook* (DHFS 1996d) states that an 'equivalent full-time place...is calculated by adding the number of hours of care provided for each child in the scheme on any day (up to a maximum of 12 hours per day for each child) and dividing it by 7'. This is quite different from the calculation of a 'place' for other service types, since family day care 'EFTs' are used to assess the capacity of a coordination unit to service its family day care providers.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

One of the descriptive indicators for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision includes the term 'place' (places available by service type). While the term is not defined, a discussion of the indicator implies that 'place' is defined in terms of 'number of hours' and that this may cause problems of comparability. Jurisdictions were asked to 'footnote the definitions used' for this indicator.

Conclusion

The size or capacity of the sector is an important item on which to collect information, and the issues of defining 'places' need to be addressed. It is also important to consider collecting information on the number of places for children of specific age groups in long day care centres in order to monitor this aspect of capacity and availability.

If it is decided to collect data on 'places' through a census of service providers, it is important to understand how these data compare with administrative data on 'places'.

It is probably difficult to develop a comparable definition of 'place' between service types. A measure of 'full-time place' could be defined for each service type. Where services are licensed, a 'full-time place' would be equivalent to a 'licensed place'. Where services are not licensed, one possible way to collect data on 'number of places' would be to collect data on 'number of children who can be in care at any one time' and 'number of hours that care/service is provided', multiply these two to get total hours of care and then divide by the appropriate number of hours assigned to a full-time place, to calculate 'number of places'.

'Places by age' would be a separate data element. It would seem most appropriate to ask specifically about the age group or groups in which jurisdictions are interested (for instance, children under 2 years, or children in before/after school care). If service providers do not allocate places in terms of the particular categorisation requested, they can be asked to estimate the number of places allocated.

8.3 Utilisation/vacancies

Introduction

Obtaining data to measure the indicator 'utilisation of children's services' is extremely important. Information on the *utilisation* of child care services is required for planning purposes, so that use of services can be compared with service capacity. Such information can be used to assist in determining if new or expanded services are required, or if there is an over-capacity in certain areas. Several different approaches are used to measure over-capacity/under-capacity in the various data collections under review in this report: the number of *vacancies*, the number of children on *waiting lists* or the *utilisation rate*.

Description of questions

CP Census

Questions about *vacancies* were asked in the CP Census of long day care centres (but not in the other CP Censuses). In the first set of questions, providers were asked whether they had any full-time vacancies (defined as 'a place [that] is available for the full day throughout the whole week') and if so to show the number of vacancies by age group. Another set of questions asked about part-time vacancies (defined as 'a place [that] is available for part of the week e.g. 1 day and/or half days/sessions'). In both cases, respondents were instructed to exclude 'places which have been paid for but the child is absent'. Providers reporting part-time vacancies were asked to exclude 'short periods you are unable to fill e.g. 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.'. Full-time vacancies were counted as units (places), but respondents were asked to report part-time vacancies in hours for each day of the week (Monday to Sunday).

ABS Child Care Survey

The ABS Survey measured the availability of formal services from the point of view of parents. Respondents were asked for the number of days in the last 4 weeks when they wanted to use some or more formal care for their children but the service was not available (by the main type of service required). Where parents had this type of 'unmet demand' they were asked for the main reason why the service was not available and presented with a number of alternatives. Some of these alternatives related to the overall supply of services (e.g. 'booked out/no places', 'none exist in area/don't know of any in area'), some to service characteristics ('cost/too expensive') and some to characteristics of the child in relation to service provision ('child too young/old', 'child has special needs [illness/disability]').

South Australia

In South Australia, the questionnaire for integrated services centres asked for the 'number of children on *waiting list* who cannot be accepted due to full capacity', while the family day care questionnaire asked for the 'number of FDC children on waiting list'. The questionnaires for long day care centres and TAFE child care centres asked for the *utilisation rate*, defined as 'the average number of children utilising your centre per session or hour (whichever is applicable) during the reference week'.

Victoria

In Victoria, the questionnaire for TAFE child care centres asked respondents if they had a *waiting list* in Term 2. Those who answered 'Yes' were asked for the 'number of children on the Term 2 waiting list' by each type of user (student, staff, community).

Discussion

In the CP unit record data, part-time vacancies are presented in terms of equivalent full-time vacancies, which are calculated using 'total hours per day of part-time vacancies' reported by providers. The Department is concerned about the quality of its data on part-time vacancies and is carrying out work to improve their quality.

If it is assumed that the instructions on 'number of places by age group' also apply to the question 'show number of vacancies by age group', there may be similar problems of comparability across service providers (see above).

Information on *waiting lists* gives an indication in relation to an individual provider that the demand for the service is greater than its capacity, but *waiting lists* will probably not be a good measure in aggregate, since individual children may be placed by their parents on waiting lists at more than one service provider. With the concerns about the over-capacity in relation to demand (SCARC 1998), waiting lists are probably an irrelevant measure for some service types.

The South Australian *utilisation rate* gives a measure of service utilisation for each provider, which can then be compared with the provider's capacity. It is not apparent, however, how a provider would 'estimate the average number of children' using a centre per session or hour, nor whether data on 'number of children per session' are comparable with data on 'number of children per hour'.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision has a descriptive indicator 'average hours of attendance by service type', the purpose of which is to provide information about *utilisation*. It is apparent from the definition, however, that this indicator measures 'the average hours *each child* attends the service' ('total hours of attendance at government funded and/or provided services in the sample week divided by the total number of children using that service type in the sample week'), not service utilisation. The hours each child attends the service may be 4 hours on average per week, but this may represent three children attending an average of 4 hours per week, for instance, or 30 children. This indicator, thus, provides no information which can assist in measuring under-capacity/over-capacity.

New South Wales

The New South Wales questionnaire asks service providers to specify 'the number of children attending each a.m. and p.m. for each day of the representative week', with a box for 'a.m.' and a box for 'p.m.' for each day, Monday through Sunday. This provides information to enable utilisation (number of children) to be compared with service capacity (number of places), in situations where only one child occupied one 'place' during each half-day period.

Conclusion

The development of data to measure utilisation/capacity needs further consideration by the Children's Services Data Working Group. Issues include the reporting of full-time and part-time vacancies and whether data should be available for each day of the reporting period or in aggregate.

If the focus is specifically on service use in relation to capacity, a question on average *utilisation rate* may provide sufficient information for monitoring services operating 'under-capacity'. For example data obtained from the question in the South Australia questionnaire for long day care centres and TAFE child care centres – 'the average number of children utilising your centre per session or hour (whichever is applicable) during the reference week' – could be compared with data on total service capacity.

For long day care centres, FaCS defines the 'utilisation rate' as 'total booked hours of care' / (hours of opening * approved places). While FaCS is carrying out work to improve the quality of its data on part-time vacancies (as noted above), the department has stated that it is unlikely to change its approach to calculating 'utilisation rates'.

8.4 Sponsor

Introduction

The term 'sponsor', in the context of children's services, is defined in Chapter 2 as 'The entity (person, organisation, or enterprise) that is legally responsible for the provision of the service'. For licensed services, the 'sponsor' in most cases is the licensee. Where services are

funded, the person or organisation that signs the funding agreement is the 'sponsor'. Information about sponsorship of children's services is required in order to monitor the levels of activity in the industry by various sectors: government (Commonwealth, State and local), non-profit organisations and private-for-profit enterprises. This information is also important to measure the extent and impact of the 'contracting out' of services, including children's services, by governments. Information on sponsorship of children's services is collected, through a census, only in South Australia and only for a few service types.

Description of questions

South Australia

The South Australian censuses of long day care centres and integrated services centres asked respondents about their *affiliation*, with the question worded 'What is the name and type of organisation or agency which sponsors your centre?' Respondents were asked to write the name of the sponsoring organisation, and also to select one of 13 possible categories as the type of sponsor: the children's services branch of the State department; an 'affiliate' of the branch; the education branch of the department; a tertiary institution; an independent school; another educational institution; local government; an incorporated community group; a church group; a hospital; a private operator; 'other'; and 'not known'. The censuses of outside school hours care services asked only for the name of the sponsor.

Other data collections/definitions

CP administrative data collection

The CP administrative data collection uses the following categories for 'sponsorship': local government; non-profit; religious/charitable; privately owned; State Government; and Commonwealth Government (DHFS 1997c:Table 3 ii).

National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0

The *National Health Data Dictionary, Version 7.0*, has a data element 'establishment type', which classifies health 'establishments' along three dimensions. One of these dimensions is 'legislative approval' status, which seems to be analogous to 'sponsorship' in children's services. The other two dimensions are: (a) what type of service they offer (e.g. acute care hospital, day surgery centre, health centre, nursing home); and (b) whether they are residential or non-residential. The categories used in the data element are: public; private (profit); private (non-profit); private (charitable); and government (veterans affairs, defence forces, other Commonwealth, State Government, local government) (AIHW 1998b:150-151).

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

A draft version (June 1998) of the data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision proposed a new descriptor, labelled 'management type', for the 'management arrangements' of service providers, with five categories: community; private; employer sponsored; religious and charitable; and local government. However, several jurisdictions found that the suggested categories were inappropriate and the development of this descriptor has been postponed. One difficulty with this descriptor arises in cases where the 'sponsor' and 'management body' are different entities, for

example, where one organisation *sponsors* a service but the service itself is *managed* by a committee composed of parents and staff.

Conclusion

Sponsorship is a basic variable used in analyses of children's services, and is probably included in most administrative data collections, rather than in censuses. If it is not possible to link the administrative information on sponsorship to the records of individual service providers in the census, then a question on sponsorship should be included, similar to the one used in South Australia, using a nationally agreed set of categories for the responses. A nationally agreed definition of 'sponsor' also will need to be used, either the one proposed here – 'The entity (person, organisation, or enterprise) that is legally responsible for the provision of the service' – or a suitable alternative. It will also be necessary to distinguish, where appropriate, between 'sponsor' and 'management body', which in some cases are not identical (see Chapter 2).

8.5 Type of service delivery setting

Introduction

Information about the service delivery setting may be used to enhance the understanding of service availability and how services are provided (AIHW 1998a:3.103). Such information is collected in the CP Censuses of outside school hours care services, and by Victoria for preschool and occasional care services.

While most long day care takes place in purpose-built or modified facilities (long day care centres), or homes (family day care), other types of services are more likely to take place in facilities that are not specifically designed for the services. This is also now the case for preschools, as many jurisdictions have introduced greater flexibility to this type of service by funding its provision in other settings, such as in long day care centres.

Description of questions used

CP Census

The CP Censuses of outside school hours care services asked for the *type of venue* used, with a list of options including 'school', 'church hall', 'community building', 'house' and 'other (please specify)'.

Victoria

The Victoria questionnaires for preschool and occasional care services asked for the *physical setting*, explained as 'the *type of building* or *facility* from which the...service operates'. The list of options for both services includes 'child care centre', 'community centre/facility/hall', 'kindergarten/preschool centre', 'multipurpose children's centre', 'early intervention centre', and 'other (please specify)'. The list for occasional care services added 'leisure/sport/recreation facility' and 'neighbourhood house/community leisure centre'. For preschool services, a second question asked if the 'building' was located on 'school premises'.

Discussion

One difference between these two collections is the name of the data item: the CP uses *type of venue*, while Victoria uses *physical setting*. Another difference is in the lists of possible settings, but this is because one collection obtains the information on services for school age children, while the other obtains information on services for children below school age.

Other data collections/definitions

National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0

The *National Community Services Data Dictionary, Version 1.0* contains this data element and defines it as follows: 'The type of physical setting in which a service(s) is actually provided to a client, irrespective of whether or not this is the same as the usual location of the service providing agency' (AIHW 1998a:3.103).

National Classifications of Community Services, Version 1.0

The categories of the various types of service delivery settings, according to the dictionary, should be 'mappable to the community services settings classification in *National Classifications of Community Services, Version 1.0*'. The main categories in the national classification relevant to children's services are (AIHW 1997b:122-128):

- 201 Private home of the service provider, which includes residential homes of carers who provide family day care.
- 305 General community infrastructure facility, i.e. a facility built for general purpose use, including community centres or halls, leisure or sport or recreation centres.
- 501 Centre-based community services setting (excluding centre-based accommodation/care), i.e. a facility built for a specific purpose(s), including child care centres, early intervention centres, kindergartens or preschool centres, neighbourhood houses, and multipurpose (community services) centres.
- 504 Educational or research setting, which includes primary schools (but not preschools).

Conclusion

It can be argued that all centre-based long day care takes place in 'child care centres', and all family day care in 'private homes of the service provider', and thus it is not necessary to gather such information for these two service types for a minimum data set. The service delivery setting for other service types, however, may vary considerably, and thus merits consideration for inclusion. If this data item is adopted for inclusion, it will be necessary to develop categories of settings specific to each service type.

8.6 Linkages with other service types

Introduction

Because children may use more than one type of service, linkages have developed between some service types. Such linkages also have been encouraged and facilitated by

Governments in response to calls from parents for easier access to services. The discussion below is divided into three main forms of these linkages:

- access to preschool for children in long day care services;
- linkages between the various types of outside school hours care services; and
- other types of services provided by centre-based services.

The censuses of the service providers covered here have all included questions about these linkages. A related, but different, data item is the use of different services by children (Section 6.2).

8.6.1 Access to preschool for children in long day care services

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses of long day care centres, family day care providers, and occasional care centres have asked about access to preschool services for children in their care. Long day care centres were asked if they 'provide a preschool program run in-house by a qualified *early childhood* teacher' during the reference week. A note stated 'exclude Diploma qualifications', indicating that teachers with only 'Diploma' qualifications should not be counted as an 'early childhood teacher'. For occasional care centres, the question was 'Do you provide a preschool program run in-house by a qualified *preschool* teacher?' There was no mention of the reference week, nor was there an instruction to 'exclude Diploma qualifications'.

Long day care centres and family day care providers were asked if they took children to an external preschool program, with the following questions:

- Long day care centres – 'During the [census] week, did this service take children out to a preschool program at any of the following?' A table on the form showed for each jurisdiction the name of the service type, the funding department and the entry age. Respondents were instructed to 'exclude children going independently to preschool with their families outside booked hours of care'. Another question asked 'How many children did you take to one of these services?'
- Family day care providers – 'During booked hours of care do any children go to preschool?' A note gave the names used for preschool in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania. Another question asked 'How many children went to preschool during the census week?' Respondents were instructed to exclude their own children, and to exclude 'children going to preschool independently with their families outside booked hours of care'.

South Australia

In South Australia, the censuses of long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres asked respondents to indicate the types of 'programs and services' they provided. The lists of possible responses for each of these service types included 'preschool within 12 months entitlement', 'preschool approved early entry/extended', and 'pre-entry' (these three categories representing the different arrangements under which children can attend preschool in South Australia – see Moyle et al. 1996:18).

Victoria

Victoria provides special funding to approved long day care centres offering a preschool program, and conducts a census of these service providers. The form notes that 'only those children enrolled in the funded preschool program' should be included in the collection. Respondents were asked to provide the numbers of children 'enrolled and attending' preschool, as of the census date. The numbers were broken down in two ways:

- children attending 'a first year of funded preschool' and children 'approved through the regional assessment process to attend a second year of funded preschool'
- children attending the centre 'to access the funded preschool program only' and children attending 'the long day care program as well as the preschool program'.

Another question asked how the funded preschool program operates within the long day care centre, either 'combined with the long day care program', or 'a discrete block of time per day/week'.

Discussion

Provision of preschool within long day care centres is a major policy objective in some jurisdictions. The CP, South Australian, and Victorian data collections obtained information on long day care centres that provide this service. The Victorian collection obtained information on the numbers of children accessing an in-house preschool disaggregated into the number of children using the centre for preschool only and the number using the centre for preschool and long day care.

One issue related is what constitutes an in-house preschool service. The CP Census stipulates that it must be run by a 'qualified early childhood teacher' (or 'qualified preschool teacher'), and that teachers with 'Diploma qualifications' do not meet this criteria. Victoria approves long day care centres to be funded for a preschool program, and requires centres ('agencies') receiving such funding to 'employ a trained teacher, holding an approved early childhood qualification, to plan and deliver the preschool program' (Victoria DHS 1997:9). The list of 'approved early childhood qualifications' includes many that are 'Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood)', which is not accepted by the CP as 'qualified'.

Only the CP collected information on whether children in family day care or in a long day care centre are taken out to a local 'preschool'. There are difficulties with such a question due to the different definitions of 'preschool' in the various jurisdictions (see Section 4.3). The CP questionnaires have attempted to overcome this by providing a list of the terminology used for 'preschool' in each jurisdiction. However, the list used in 1997 did not include programs in Queensland and Western Australia that have been recommended in this report to be included in 'preschool'.

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

The children's services data collection manual for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision contains an indicator 'Proportion of service delivery locations/sites with co-located services', which could include the provision of preschool services by long day care providers. However, no data have yet been specified to enable this indicator to be measured.

New South Wales

The data collection in New South Wales asked agencies completing the form, including long day care centres, to indicate the types of services they are *funded* to provide. The list of possible responses was similar to the lists used in South Australia and included 'preschool'. Long day care centres providing a preschool service that was not *funded* by the State Government, however, would not necessarily have reported that they provided this service.

Queensland

The census forms used for 'child care' services in Queensland asked respondents 'What is your service *licensed* for? (please tick all that apply).' Four possible responses were listed: long day care, 'kindergarten care', family day care, and 'occasional care/limited hours care'. It is not clear, however, if all long day care centres providing a preschool service would be *licensed* to provide this service.

Conclusion

It is important to collect information on whether 'preschool' is accessible for children using long day care services. The approach taken by the CP of asking long day care centres and family day care providers if they take children to 'preschool' – or (in the case of long day care centres), if a preschool program is provided in-house – is sensible. It is necessary to have an agreed definition of 'preschool' in order to ensure accuracy in obtaining information on taking children to an external preschool and on what constitutes an in-house preschool service. The Australian Early Childhood Association could be asked to advise on the type of qualifications required for a person (teacher) providing a 'preschool service'.

8.6.2 Linkages between various types of outside school hours services

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses of before/after school care services and vacation care services have asked about linkages within and between outside school hours care services.

Providers of before/after school care were asked two questions about the type of care provided: 'Do you provide before school care?' and 'Do you provide after school care?' In both cases, a note instructed the respondents to 'Only include services which receive some Commonwealth *funding*'.

These providers were also asked a series of questions about vacation care. First, they were asked to 'Indicate links with vacation care', with an instruction to 'Tick one or more' of the following options:

1. Linked with vacation care to provide a year round care program
2. Our sponsoring organisation (e.g. school etc) runs this before/after school care service and vacation care
3. We reserve places in a vacation care program run by a separate organisation
4. No links with vacation care and parents make their own arrangements
5. Other – please specify

Respondents who ticked numbers 1 and/or 2 of these options were then asked questions about the source of the funding for their vacation care service, and the number of children in the before/after school care service who attended the last vacation care 'program'.

Vacation care providers were asked to 'Indicate links with before/after school care services', with a similar set of options and an instruction to 'Tick one or more...':

1. Linked with before/after school care services to provide a year round care program
2. Our sponsoring organisation (e.g. school etc.) runs this service and before/after school care
3. One or more before/after school care services reserve places in this service
4. No links with before/after school care services and parents make their own arrangements *for vacation care*
5. Other -- please specify

South Australia

The South Australian census of before/after school care providers asked 'Does this program operate a vacation care program in addition to out of school hours care?' Respondents who answered 'Yes' were asked 'How many of the children attending this program also attend the vacation care program?' Vacation care providers were not asked if they had links to a before/after school hours care program.

Victoria

In Victoria, providers of 'school age child care' were asked about hours of operation and attendances for each of four types of this care: before school care, after school care, pupil free days and vacation care. However, respondents were asked to include only *funded* services.

Discussion

In each of the three collections it is possible to determine which providers offered more than one type of service. However, in some collections only similarly *funded* services were to be included.

The CP questions are more complex than those used in South Australia and Victoria. This is because the data collection was undertaken in 1997, during a time when the Commonwealth encouraged linkages between before/after school care and vacation care services by giving priority for funding to organisations offering the 'year-round care' model (Moyle et al. 1997:7-9).

Other data collections/definitions

Review of Commonwealth-State Service Provision

See Section 8.6.1.

Queensland

The Queensland form for 'outside school hours care' providers were asked what types of care were offered, with the following options: before school care, after school care, vacation/pupil free day care, before preschool care, after preschool care.

Conclusion

In examining the linkages between before/after school care services and vacation care services, jurisdictions need to examine what type of information they require. Do they require information about the service provider, the location or both? For instance, an after school care service and a vacation care service can be provided by the same service provider and the same sponsor but at different locations; these services can also be provided by a different service provider and a different sponsor at the same location.

8.6.3 Other types of services provided in centres

Description of questions

CP Census

The CP Censuses did not contain questions about other types of services provided, apart from the questions about provision of preschool noted above.

South Australia

In South Australia, the censuses of long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres asked respondents to 'Indicate which services your centre provides'. Similarly, the census of preschool services asked respondents to 'Indicate which services are provided for children attending your centre'. The lists of services which the respondents used to answer the question were not the same on each questionnaire, but all of them included 'preschool' in the various forms funded by the State Government ('preschool within 12 months entitlement', 'preschool approved early entry/extended', and 'pre-entry'), as discussed above. Other service types listed on all the questionnaires were 'occasional and emergency care', 'family day care', 'out of school hours care' (or on some forms, 'before and/or after school hours care'), 'vacation care', and 'toy library'. The forms for long day care centres, TAFE child care centres, and integrated services centres included 'long day care' in the list, but the form for preschool services did not include 'long day care'.

Victoria

The Victorian censuses of preschools and long day care centres with a funded preschool program asked respondents to indicate what other children's services were 'offered at the same site'. The list of possible responses for both questionnaires included occasional care and 'school age care', along with some other types of services for children and families: 3-year old group, early intervention, maternal and child health, play group. The form for preschools also listed 'long day care' and 'extended hours'.

Discussion

Both South Australia and Victoria only asked a selection of different types of service providers if they offered other types of services. One difference between the two collections is that Victoria asked preschools if they also provide long day care, but South Australia did not do so.

Other data collections/definitions

See Section 8.6.1.

Conclusion

Given the increasing attention to the co-location of services on one site, it would be desirable for data collections to include this information. Whether the additional services are licensed or funded may not be important for a national data collection. Thus a question on this subject could be simplified for centre-based service providers, such as 'Indicate which service types are provided at your centre (please tick all that apply)', with a standardised list of options to include the main forms of children's services: long day care, preschool, family day care, occasional care, before/after school care, vacation care. Definitions of these service types would also need to be provided on the form.

8.7 Fees charged

Introduction

It is important to collect information on fees charged by service providers in order to assess the actual cost of child care for parents, which equals fees charged minus any government subsidies. As noted in Section 5.13 (Family income), information about the actual costs of child care is essential in measuring affordability. The periods for which service providers charge fees may vary; for instance, fees may be charged on a weekly, daily, sessional and/or hourly basis. Service providers may also charge parents levies for items such as toys or other equipment.

Information on fees was obtained in the CP, South Australian and Victorian data collections for all service types, except for preschools in South Australia, State model outside school hours care services in Victoria and family day care in both these jurisdictions. The CP Census collected very detailed data on fees for all types of services, particularly for family day care. Since fees charged vary considerably by service type, questions on fees are discussed separately for these service types.

Description of questions

Preschools

Victoria

The Victorian preschool form asked respondents to report the 'standard term fee' charged 'for the majority of children' in the funded preschool program, and the 'hours per week' a child could attend for this 'standard' fee. Respondents were then asked whether or not they charged 'any alternative fees', excluding 'reduced fees for Health Card holders'. If respondents answered 'Yes', they were asked to give one or more reasons why such fees were charged, with a number of alternatives – e.g. 'different hours, more than one child from the same family, other (please specify)'. In the last question on fees, respondents were asked whether or not they charged a levy, with some examples such as an equipment levy.

There were two questions on fees in the preschool (long day care centre) form. Respondents were first asked for the 'hourly fee charged for a 4-year-old to attend the long day care program'. If service providers did not charge an hourly fee, they were given instructions as to how to calculate an hourly fee. In the next question, service providers were asked to

report the 'hourly fee charged for a child to attend the funded preschool program only', with instructions to enter the hourly fee even if it was the same fee as in the preceding question.

Long day care centres and integrated services centres

CP Census

In the CP Census all long day care centre providers were asked if their fees varied for different age groups. If they answered 'Yes', they were asked to report fees for four different representative age groups (12 months; 24 months; 36 months; before/after school care) according to four different time periods (weekly; hourly; daily; sessional). Where a sessional fee was reported, they were asked for 'hours per session' for children not at school and for children using the service for before/after school care. If fees did not vary by age, service providers were asked to report fees according to the same four time periods and, where they reported a sessional fee, to show hours per session. Where there was a 'sliding scale' for families (that is, fees were reduced for second and subsequent children), service providers were instructed to report the fee for the first child.

South Australia

In the South Australian data collection for long day care centres and TAFE child care centres, service providers were asked to report on the 'maximum fee' and the 'minimum fee' 'charged at your centre *per child, per week*'. Providers of integrated services were simply asked to report the 'maximum fee charged' and 'minimum fee charged'.

Victoria

In the Victorian TAFE child care questionnaire, respondents were asked to 'indicate the standard fee charged before Childcare Assistance' for each of three categories of users (students; staff; community) for three time periods (weekly; daily; half day).

Family day care fees

CP Census

The CP Census form for the family day care coordination unit contained a number of questions on fees. Respondents were first asked to report their 'full-time fee per week' for 50 hours of care, excluding the 'gap fee' and any administrative levy. The next question asked whether or not fees varied for different types of care. If service providers answered 'Yes', they were asked to report fees according to one or more hourly rates – part-time rate (if different to full-time); before/after school care rate (if different to full-time); and maximum hourly rate, e.g. casual, weekend, evening. Where a part-time hourly rate was reported, respondents were asked for 'maximum part-time hours'. Fees were to be reported at the 'first child rate' where there was a 'sliding scale' for families. All respondents were then asked to attach their current fee schedule to the completed questionnaire. In the next question, respondents were asked whether they charged a levy for use of equipment and resources, a toy library levy, an annual membership fee or a building levy (with the instructions to exclude 'once-off registration fee' and 'caregiver levy'). If they answered 'Yes' they were asked to report the current weekly levy for 50 hours of care and to state whether this was the amount for each family or for each child.

Fees for outside school hours care services

CP Census

In the CP Census before/after school care form, service providers were asked to report the 'regular fee charged per session per child' for before school care and for after school care. They were then asked for the 'usual number of hours per session' for each type of care. Vacation care providers were initially asked 'Does this vacation care service charge a fee?' If they answered 'Yes', they were asked 'What are the fees?' and given the option of reporting half day, short day (school hours e.g. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.), daily or weekly fees. Before/after school care providers were instructed to exclude breakfast and transport charges from reported fees and vacation care providers to exclude excursion charges. All service providers were instructed to report the 'one child rate' where there was a sliding scale for families.

South Australia

The South Australian before/after school care and vacation care forms asked respondents to report the 'average hourly fee per child'. Where respondents charged sessional fees, they were given instructions as to how to calculate an average hourly fee. This question was followed by the question 'sliding scale fee' with two response categories 'highest hourly fee' and 'lowest hourly fee'.

Victoria

The Victorian form for Commonwealth model before/after school care and vacation care asked service providers to report the 'lowest daily fee charged' and the 'highest daily fee charged'. Since fees for State model outside school hours care services were set by the Victorian Department of Human Services, it was not necessary to obtain information on fees through a data collection.

Occasional care fees

CP Census

The first question on fees on the CP occasional care form was 'Does your service charge an hourly fee'. Respondents who answered 'Yes' were asked to report the amount of the hourly fee. Those who answered 'No' were asked 'What are your fees?' and given two options 'sessional fees' and 'other fees'. If 'sessional fees' were reported, respondents were asked for 'hours per session'; where 'other fees' were reported, they were asked for 'hours'.

South Australia

In the South Australian occasional care form, the initial question on fees was exactly the same as that for outside school hours care services. Respondents were then asked if they used a 'sliding fee scale' and if they answered 'Yes', they were asked to report 'highest hourly fee' and 'lowest hourly fee'. There were no questions on occasional care fees on the preschool form, that is, on fees for occasional care services operating in preschools.

Victoria

The Victorian occasional care forms simply asked for the 'maximum fee per hour charged'.

Discussion

It is difficult to compare questions on fees across the service types because these questions partly reflect the different charging practices associated with different types of services. 'Term', for instance, was the reference period in the Victorian form for preschools, 'weekly/daily/hourly' in the CP forms for long day care services, 'sessional' in the CP form for before/after school care services and 'half day/ short day (school hours)/daily/weekly' in the CP form for vacation care services. Similarly, since many long day care centres charge higher fees for younger children, the CP Census for long day care centres included a question about fees for children of different ages. This type of question, however, would not be asked for funded preschool programs in Victoria, since children are all in the same age group (that is, in the year before full-time school).

Even within service types, however, questions on fees varied, making comparisons difficult. For before/after school care services for instance, the CP Census asked service providers to report the 'regular fee charged per session', the South Australian collection asked for the 'average hourly fee', and the Victorian data collection for the 'lowest daily fee' and 'highest daily fee'. In order to compare fees across the different collections, it is first necessary to know 'hours per session' where 'sessional' fees were reported and hours per day where 'daily fees' were reported in order to convert all fees to 'hourly fees'. Further, the relationship between 'regular fees' (CP), 'average fees' (South Australia) and 'lowest' and 'highest' fees (Victoria) needs to be understood in order to make such a comparison.

Similarly, it is difficult to compare data on long day care centre fees across the data collections. The South Australian collection obtained data on 'maximum' and 'minimum' fees and the Victorian collection on 'the standard fee charged before Childcare Assistance' for the three groups of parent users. The CP Census, however, simply asked for 'fees' where centres did not charge varying fees and 'fees for four different representative age groups', where fees varied by age of child. (In 1995, the CP Census data on long day care fees were subsequently published as 'average fees'; where a centre's fees varied for different age groups, these data were used in conjunction with data on places by age group to calculate 'average fee'.) In terms of comparability across the various collections, for all data collections, the reference period for long day care centres fees was 'week'. However, it is difficult to understand the relationship between 'average' fees (CP), 'maximum' and 'minimum' fees (South Australia) and 'standard fees for three different parent groups' (students; staff; community – Victoria).

Where the terms 'maximum/minimum' and 'highest/lowest' are used to refer to fee levels, the basis on which these different levels of fees are charged (e.g. age of child, position of child in family) is not always clear.

Within any one collection, for any particular service type, 'weekly' or 'sessional' fees may not be strictly comparable, since they may refer to different numbers of hours of service provision. Thus, for instance, two long day care centres may charge a full-time weekly fee of \$170, but one centre may be open for 8 hours per day 5 days a week, while the other may be open for 11 hours per day 5 days a week.

It is not always clear whether 'fees' as reported include charges for 'service components' (see organisational units section). For instance, in the CP Census for before/after school care services, providers were asked to exclude breakfast and transport charges from reported fees, but no such instructions were included in the before/after school care data collections for South Australia and Victoria.

Other data collections/definitions

Queensland

In addition to asking questions on fees in general, the Queensland data collection asked service providers to report charges for various service components, such as charges for meals (e.g. breakfast) in outside school hours care and for nappy services in long day care, kindergarten and occasional care.

Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

One of the descriptive indicators used for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision is 'average fees charged for children's services per child'. This is defined as 'the average fee (including contributions by users) of each type of children's services per child in the sample week'. The data manual specifies that the reference period for average fees for long day care centres, family day care, vacation care and 'other care' is 'week', for before and after school care 'session' and for occasional care and preschools 'hour'. Where jurisdictional data collections do not obtain 'average fees' and/or obtain fees according to a different reference period to that requested, there will be issues of data comparability and quality.

Conclusion

Questions on fees need to be worded so that the information that is obtained is clear and unambiguous.

One way of deriving an 'average hourly fee' that would cover most service types would be to obtain either 'average weekly fee' and 'hours of operation' or the 'sessional fee' and 'hours per session', so that an 'average hourly fee' can be calculated when the data are processed. Respondents would be instructed to use the 'one child rate' if there was a sliding scale for families. Decisions would need to be made, however, in relation to situations where fees vary depending on the age of the child or on the status of the parent (for instance, 'student' status).

In terms of questions on fees for specific service types (such as family day care), policy makers, planners, service operators and other interested parties need to be consulted in order to determine what information should be collected.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSSCQ	Australian Bureau of Statistics Standard Classification of Qualifications
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASCED	Australian Standard Classification of Education
CD	Census Collection District
CP	Childcare Program
DETE	Department of Education, Training and Employment (South Australia)
DSS	Department of Social Security (Commonwealth)
D-SUPS	Supplementary services for children with a disability
EFT	Equivalent full-time
FaCS	Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS)
FDC	Family day care
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
GISCA	National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems
ICIDH	International Classification of Impairments, Diseases and Handicaps
JET	Jobs, Education and Training (Commonwealth)
MDS	Minimum data set
NCSIMG	National Community Services Information Management Group
NESB	Non-English-speaking background
RRMA	Regional and Remote Area and Metropolitan Area Classification
RRRA	Regional and Remote Area Classification
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SLA	Statistical Local Area
SUPS	Supplementary Services Program (Commonwealth)
TAB	Take A Break (Occasional care, Victoria)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
WHO	World Health Organization

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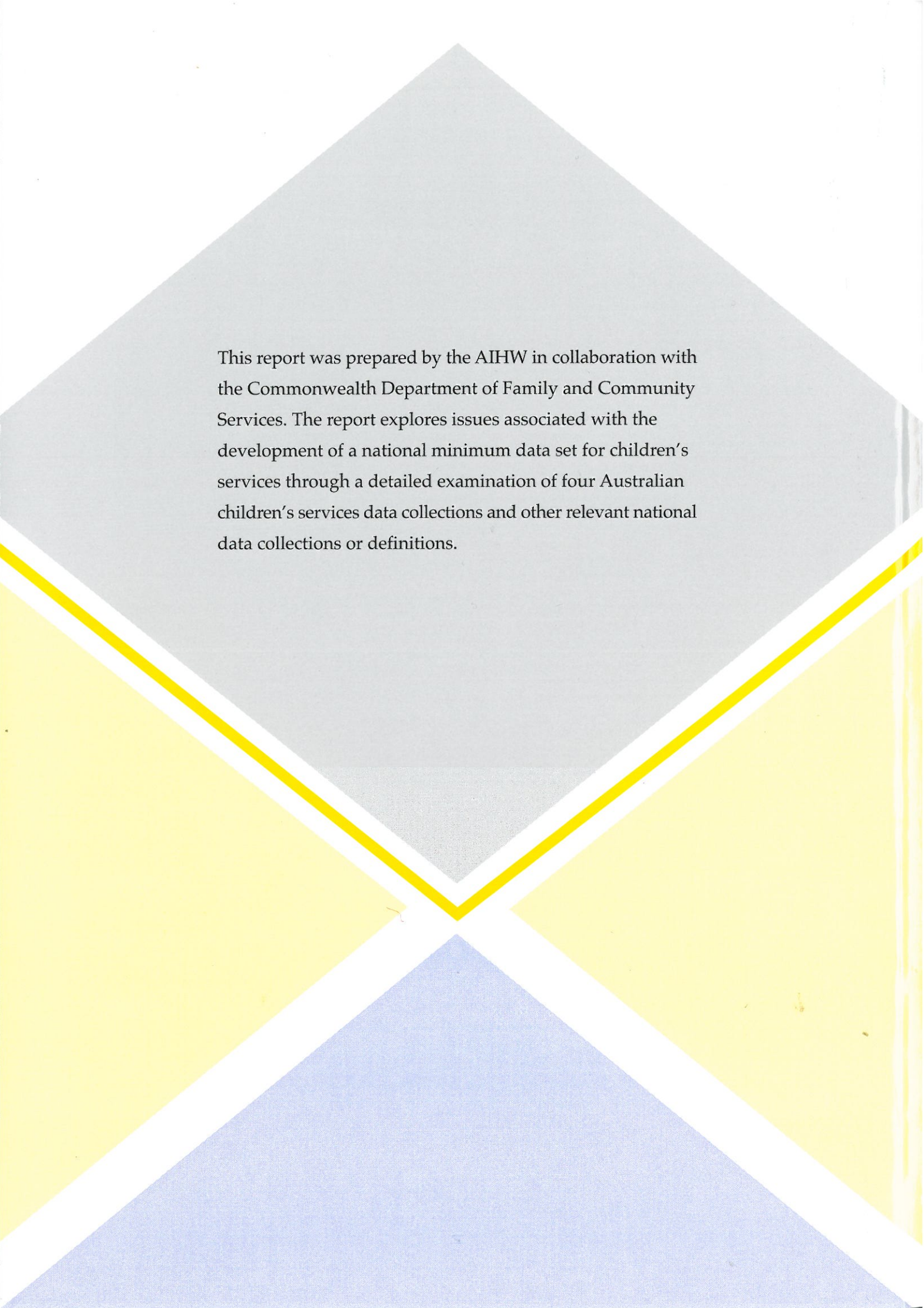
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This report was prepared by the AIHW in collaboration with the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. The report explores issues associated with the development of a national minimum data set for children's services through a detailed examination of four Australian children's services data collections and other relevant national data collections or definitions.