

The data and their limitations

Introduction

Residential aged care in Australia was restructured in 1997–98. The two separate categories of residential care (nursing homes and hostels) were combined into a single program from 1 October 1997. As a result, the two previous data collection systems (the Nursing Home Payment System (NHPS) and the Commonwealth Hostel Information Payment System (CHIPS)) were replaced on 1 October 1997 by a single system – the ‘System for the Payment of Aged Residential Care’ (SPARC). This new system is the primary data source for this report.

The new system inherited all existing records on the NHPS at 1 October 1997. For the data on the CHIPS, only those records that related to the following two groups of people were carried over:

1. those who were in a hostel at 1 October 1997; and
2. those who had a valid Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) assessment covering 1 October; they were regarded as potential residents.

In other words, the records for residents discharged from hostels before 1 October 1997 are not available on SPARC although they are still available on CHIPS.

SPARC contains information gathered through a number of instruments. Among those instruments, the following three are directly relevant to this report:

- ‘Aged Care Application and Approval’, a form completed by a person applying for admission to an aged care service or someone (normally a carer) on behalf of the applicant;
- ‘Application for Classification’, a form containing the Resident Classification Scale (RCS) and completed by the aged care service to determine the resident’s overall level of care needs; and
- ‘Monthly Claim Form’, a form for claiming Commonwealth benefits completed by the aged care service as part of the monthly funding cycle.

Population data are from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s general population databases supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Resident information

All residents admitted to residential aged care must have a valid Aged Care Application and Approval form completed by an authorised ACAT officer. This form is valid for 12 months from the date of the approval.

The information entered into SPARC from the Aged Care Application and Approval form is the major source for the following data items in the tables:

- sex;
- date of birth;
- marital status;

- pension status;
- Indigenous status;
- country of birth;
- preferred language;
- resident's usual residence (prior to admission); and
- resident's living arrangements (prior to admission).

Not all residents have all the above characteristics reported on SPARC.

Resident Classification Scale

The RCS application form is forwarded to state/territory offices of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing by aged care services for each resident admitted. On the basis of the information provided, residents are assigned to one of eight service-need categories for the purpose of funding. The information provided on the RCS status of residents is reported in Section 5 of this report.

Admission and separation date

The Monthly Claim form is sent to approved services each calendar month as part of the payment cycle. It shows claim details for the previous month plus a 'forecast' schedule for the current month. The service checks the information and records data on separations and absences (hospital and social leave) for these residents. It also adds information on any newly admitted residents for the current month.

The claim form is the source for the following data items in the tables:

- date of admission;
- date of separation;
- separation mode; and
- admission type.

Populations used in the tables in this report

It should be noted that tables in this publication refer to several different subpopulations and, consequently, may not be directly comparable. The subpopulations covered in the tables in this report are summarised below. Data presented in Sections 2 to 5 relate to people in mainstream places and exclude those in places provided by Multi-Purpose Services or funded through flexible funding under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Strategy.

Section 2: Residents and their characteristics

All tables in this section relate to the number of residents who were in aged care services on 30 June 2002. This population includes all approved residents and totalled 138,929.

Section 3: Admissions and separations

There were 47,345 admissions for permanent care (permanent admissions) and 43,309 admissions for respite care (respite admissions) over the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. Tables 3.1 to 3.3 relate to these populations.

Tables 3.4 to 3.10 refer to separations from an aged care service over the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. There were 45,284 separations of permanent residents and 43,503 separations of respite residents in that period.

Section 4: Characteristics of newly admitted residents

Tables in this section refer to the number of people admitted into residential aged care from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. Each person is counted once. For the full year reporting, there were 46,381 new residents for permanent care and 31,024 new residents for respite care.

Section 5: Resident dependency

Data on RCS dependency are only reported for permanent residents, so that respite residents are not included in this section. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in this section relate to the number of permanent residents as at 30 June 2002 (134,775 persons) who had been classified using the RCS. Permanent residents who did not have an RCS allocated (1,732 persons) are excluded from the tables. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 relate to people (45,142) who were admitted to residential aged care for permanent care during the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. Multiple admissions are excluded from these tables. People without an RCS (1,249 people) are excluded from the tables.

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 represent those permanent residents (43,517) who separated from residential aged care during the period from 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2002. A total of 794 people without an RCS are excluded from the tables. Multiple separations are also excluded from these tables.

Data limitations

It should be noted that the accuracy of some specific data items may be limited. Such cases include:

- Reported date of birth implying that a resident is less than or equal to 10 years old are regarded as input errors and 100 years is added to the age. This only alters a handful of entries in any one year.
- Death indicator: In some cases, aged care services may not be equipped to care for some terminally ill residents. Accordingly, such residents are transferred to acute-care institutions prior to death; hence there is an under-enumeration of discharges due to death.
- Length of stay: The length of stay of a resident is based upon the time between the date of admission and the date of separation in relation to completed stays, and between the date of admission and 30 June 2002 for current residents' incomplete stays. When a person is transferred from one service to another, the date of admission to the first service is the date from which the length of stay is calculated.
- The data on the number of residential places stored in the Aged and Community Care Management Information System (ACCMIS) are sensitive to dates of entry and ACCMIS is updated on a weekly basis from SPARC. Consequently the reader may find minor reporting variations depending on the version of ACCMIS used for the reporting.

- Information on whether an admission was from an acute hospital, previously available on NHPS, is not available on SPARC; therefore, relevant tables have had to be dropped from this report.
- The types of aged care services, such as government, private for-profit and private not-for-profit, previously recorded on both the NHPS and the CHIPS, are no longer identifiable on the new system (SPARC). Tables relating to this variable can therefore no longer be presented in this series.