
Chapter 14: Children's services

Children's services aim to meet the care, education and development needs of children, although the emphasis on these broad objectives may differ across the services. Child care is provided to children aged 12 years or younger, usually by someone other than the child's parents or guardian. Preschool services are provided to children mainly in the year or two before they commence full time schooling.

The children's services chapter presents performance and descriptive information for government funded and/or delivered child care and preschool services. Unless otherwise stated, the data relate to services that are supported by the Australian, State and Territory governments and provided for children aged 12 years or younger. Local governments also plan, fund and deliver children's services. However, given data limitations, this chapter records data on local government activities only where Australian, State and Territory government funding and licensing are involved. The chapter does not include services that do not receive government funding (unless otherwise noted).

Indigenous data in the children's services chapter

The children's services chapter in the *Report on Government Services 2004* contains the following data items on Indigenous people:

- Proportion of children from special needs groups attending Australian Government approved child care services, 2002.
- Proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds (relative to representation in the community, and among attendees), 2002-03.
- Proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds for each year between 1998-99 to 2002-03.

The *Report on Government Services 2004* also notes that the Australian Government provides supplementary funding for the preschool education of children from Indigenous backgrounds (Report on Government Services 2004, p. 14.6).

Supporting tables

Supporting tables for data within the children's services chapter of the compendium are contained in the attachment to the compendium. These tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an 'A' suffix (for example, table 14A.3 is table 3 in the children's services attachment to the compendium). As the data are directly sourced from

the Report on Government Services 2004, the compendium also notes where the original table, figure or text in the Report on Government Services 2004 can be found. For example, where the compendium refers to 'ROGS 2004, p. 14.15' this is page 15 of chapter 14 and 'ROGS 2004, 14A.2' is attachment table 2 of attachment 14 of the Report on Government Services 2004.

Access of target groups — representation in services

Data on the representation of children from some special needs groups in Australian Government approved child care services are available for 1997, 1999 and 2002 from the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services (AGCCCS)¹ conducted by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS) and data for August 2000 are from Centrelink administrative data. The AGCCCS and Centrelink data are not directly comparable because of differences in their collection methods.² The variations are particularly distorting for data on children from Indigenous backgrounds and for NT data.

The data indicate that the proportion of children in special needs groups in Australian Government supported child care is sometimes substantially different across jurisdictions. This variation largely reflects jurisdictional differences in the representation of children from special needs groups in the community (table 14.1).

The proportion of children who attended child care services in 2002 who were from an Indigenous background ranged from 9.8 per cent in the NT (where the representation of Indigenous children in the population was 41.4 per cent) to 0.5 per cent in Victoria (where the representation in the population was 1.1 per cent). Nationally, the representation of children from an Indigenous background in children accessing child care services was lower than this group's overall representation in the community (table 14.1).

¹ The Australian Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS) biennially conducts the AGCCCS to collect information on the characteristics of users and providers of all Australian Government funded child care services. State and Territory governments may also support many of these services. The 2001 AGCCCS, however, was limited to a survey of family day care services. Some 2001 data for other services were sourced from Centrelink administrative data for the 2002 Report. The AGCCCS was referenced in previous reports as the Commonwealth Census of Child Care Services (CCCCS).

² The AGCCCS data are collected from Australian Government approved child care services based on data provided by services. The AGCCCS includes all children attending Australian Government supported services, and there will be double counting where a child attended more than one service. Centrelink administrative data are collected from customers when they claim Child Care Benefit. As such, the data collection is restricted to customers who are eligible for Child Care Benefit. There is no double counting where children attended more than one service because Centrelink assigns each child a unique reference number.

Table 14.1 Proportion of children (aged 0–12 years) from special needs groups attending Australian Government approved child care services, 2002 (per cent)

<i>Representation</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA^a</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT^b</i>	<i>NT^b</i>	<i>Australia</i>
<i>Children from non-English speaking backgrounds</i>									
In child care services	16.3	12.3	5.9	7.2	6.4	2.4	11.0	6.3	10.8
In the community ^c	20.4	19.9	7.1	11.0	11.2	2.6	13.1	29.4	15.6
<i>Children from Indigenous backgrounds</i>									
In child care services	1.5	0.5	2.7	1.7	1.4	1.2	0.7	9.8	1.7
In the community ^c	4.1	1.1	6.6	6.5	3.4	7.0	2.3	41.4	4.6
<i>Children from low-income families</i>									
In child care services	29.1	29.0	35.2	34.3	35.4	33.6	13.7	19.1	31.2
In the community ^d	23.3	21.2	24.7	25.2	30.8	26.7	10.3	24.1	23.7
<i>Children with a disability</i>									
In child care services	2.3	2.3	2.1	1.6	3.3	2.5	2.1	2.0	2.3
In the community ^e	6.6	6.6	8.1	10.4	9.9	7.5	na	na	7.6
<i>Children from rural and remote areas</i>									
In child care services	22.1	22.1	22.9	20.2	18.5	48.6	–	31.2	22.1
In the community ^f	28.4	27.5	35.4	30.1	31.0	42.7	0.2	59.0	30.2

^a Excludes those children who attend Department of Education provided kindergartens for 4 year olds. ^b Data on children with a disability in the community were not available for publication. ^c Data relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 2001 and were obtained from the ABS 2001 Census of Population and Housing. ^d Data relate to children aged 0–14 years and were obtained from the ABS 1999–2000 Survey of Income and Housing. ^e Data relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 1998 and were obtained from the ABS 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. ^f Data relate to children aged 0–14 years at June 1996 and were obtained from the ABS 1996 Census of Population and Housing. **na** Not available. – Nil or rounded to zero.

Source: ABS 2000, (unpublished); ABS 1996 and 2001, (unpublished); ABS 1999, Cat. nos 4430.0, 4430.140.001–4430.9.40.001; AGCCCS, May 2002 (unpublished); table 14A.17; ROGS 2004, p. 14.16.

Preschools provide a range of educational and developmental programs (generally on a sessional basis) to children in the year immediately before they commence full time schooling and also, in some jurisdictions, to children aged 3 years or under (children aged 4 years or under in WA). The age from which children may attend preschools varies across jurisdictions. Victoria contributes funding towards a preschool program for all 4-year-old children, which is the year before they commence schooling. Children in the NT are usually funded by government to attend preschool in the year before they commence schooling. Younger children in NSW, Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania³ and the ACT may also access government funded preschool services.

Younger Indigenous children living in remote areas also may attend preschools in the NT and Queensland. In SA, a pre-entry program provides one session of preschool a week for

³ In Tasmania, the flexibility to enrol children of pre-kindergarten age is permitted only under limited circumstances (such as for gifted children or children previously enrolled in another State or Territory who now reside in Tasmania).

10 weeks in the term before preschool, and children from Indigenous backgrounds may attend preschool at 3 years of age. In the ACT, children from Indigenous backgrounds, children with English as a second language, and children with a hearing impairment and/or whose parents have a hearing impairment may be eligible for early entry into preschool (for 5.25 hours per week) at 3 years of age.

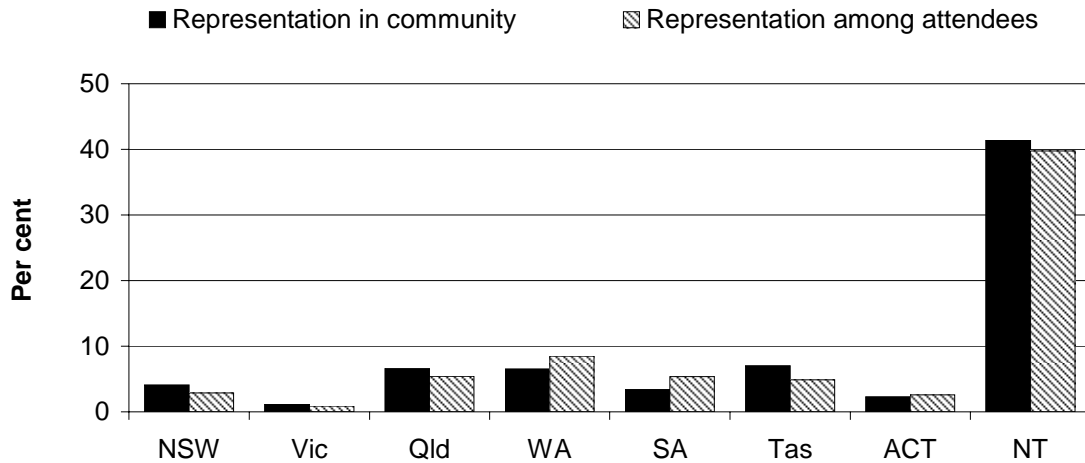
This disparity in the age from which children may access preschool services reduces the comparability of preschool data across jurisdictions. Preschool data are presented for two categories to improve comparability:

- children attending preschool in the year immediately before they commence full time schooling (data that are largely presented on a comparable basis for all jurisdictions)
- younger children attending preschool services.

In 2002-03, 83.5 per cent of children of 4 years of age attended funded and/or provided preschool in the year immediately before they commenced school. Across jurisdictions for which 2002-03 data were available, this proportion ranged from about 100 per cent in Queensland to 61.9 per cent in NSW.

Across jurisdictions, the proportion of Indigenous children attending preschools in 2002-03 was broadly similar to their representation in the community. The proportion ranged from 39.8 per cent in the NT (where the representation of Indigenous children in the community was 41.4 per cent) to 0.9 per cent in Victoria (where their representation in the community was 1.1 per cent) (figure 14.1).

Figure 14.1 **Proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds, 2002-03^{a, b}**



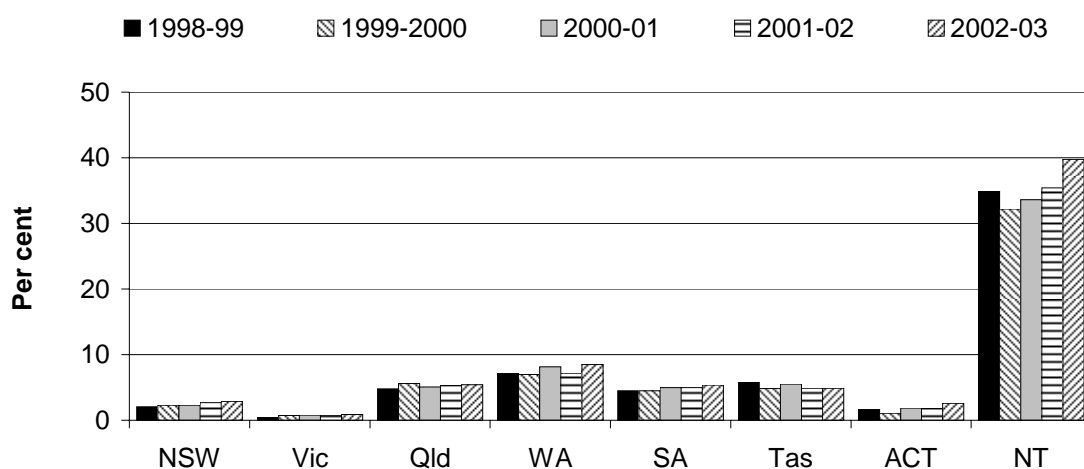
<i>Representation</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>Tas</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>NT</i>
In preschool	%	2.9	0.9	5.4	8.5	5.4	4.9	2.6	39.8
In community	%	4.1	1.1	6.6	6.5	3.4	7.0	2.3	41.4

^a Comparisons between the representation of Indigenous children among preschool attendees and their representation in the community need to be treated with caution because there are definitional differences and differences in the base population. ^b Excludes younger children attending preschool and all children attending non-government preschools.

Source: ABS 2001, (unpublished); State and Territory governments (unpublished); ROGS 2004, p. 14.17; Tables 14A.2–14A.9.

The proportion of preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds varied across jurisdictions, but has been relatively constant over time within jurisdictions (figure 14.2).

Figure 14.2 **Preschool attendees from Indigenous backgrounds^a**



Year	Unit	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
1998-99	%	2.0	0.5	4.8	7.1	4.5	5.8	1.7	34.9
1999-2000	%	2.3	0.8	5.6	6.9	4.5	4.8	1.1	32.2
2000-01	%	2.3	0.8	5.1	8.1	5.0	5.5	1.9	33.6
2001-02	%	2.7	0.8	5.3	7.2	5.0	4.9	1.8	35.4
2002-03	%	2.9	0.9	5.4	8.5	5.4	4.9	2.6	39.8

^a Excludes younger children attending preschool and children attending non-government preschools.

Source: State and Territory governments (unpublished); ROGS 2004, p. 14.18; Tables 14A.2–14A.9.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 1996, 2001, *Census of Population and Housing*, Canberra, unpublished.

— 1999, *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary Tables*, Cat. nos 4430.0, 4430.1.40.001–4430.9.40.001, Canberra.

— 2000, *1999-2000 Survey of Income and Housing*, Canberra, unpublished.