



# New report on child protection data

*Comparability of Child Protection Data*, by R. Cant & R. Downie, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, 1999.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, on behalf of the National Child Protection Data Project, has recently published the results of a project which examined the comparability of child protection data across Australia.

The project used a combination of document analysis and interviews with key personnel to identify some of the principal issues from which the report makes a series of recommendations. In particular, the report highlights the importance of comparability as it relates to opportunities for benchmarking service outputs, and defining outcomes, key performance indicators, and national reporting.

Currently in Australia, child protection matters in state and territory departments operate under different legislation, policies, and philosophies. It therefore follows that the project found significant differences in the way that child protection matters are defined and recorded.

According to the report, there was no clear definition across the jurisdictions about what constitutes child abuse. Thus child protection notifications are counted at different points in the process. For example, in Western Australia and Tasmania, which report lower rates of notifications, certain referrals are directed away at intake from a child protection pathway towards a family support pathway. It is the case that all states and territories provide for protection orders, but the reasons for granting care and protection orders differ.

The project also examined the similarities across the jurisdictions. All screen information that they receive from callers before deciding to instigate a child protection investigation, and once a decision has been made to investigate, all jurisdictions use much the same process. At a minimum they interview or sight the child, identify harm, determine an outcome, and assess protective needs. In this way the authors found that it is *what* jurisdictions investigate, not how they do it, that causes problems with comparability.

Among other things, the project recommends the adoption of a generic framework for national child protection reporting. The generic framework would involve establishing a new counting point (to be called 'child protection intake') to record cases where it is confirmed that the contact is a child protection matter warranting a statutory response.

Finally, the report highlights the importance of a full commitment from the states and territories, as they will need to make some major changes to their information systems. However, the report points out that none of the changes recommended would require change to existing legislation or policy. The benefits of taking up the recommendations would likely be felt not only in terms of making sense of annual child protection reporting but importantly in future policy making in this area.

*'Comparability of Child Protection Data'* is available online at [www.aihw.gov.au/publications/welfare/ccpd.html](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/welfare/ccpd.html)

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## National Audit of Programs

**T**he National Child Protection Clearinghouse is in the final stages of its National Audit of Child Abuse Prevention Programs which aims to provide an assessment of the state of child abuse prevention activity across Australia, and to highlight the preventative work of service providers.

Most programs will have received an Audit Questionnaire over the last few months. If you haven't already returned your questionnaire but would like to have your program included in the Audit please return it now. Approximately 35,000 questionnaires have been distributed nationally, most via the post, others via telephone interviews, or accessed online: [www.aifs.org.au/nch/](http://www.aifs.org.au/nch/)

A report of the Audit will encompass programs across the three prevention types – primary, secondary and tertiary – that is, programs targeted at the community as a whole

(primary), those targeted at specific at-risk sections of the population (secondary), and prevention initiatives aimed at preventing the recurrence of abuse (tertiary).

The Audit Report will also look at developments across the program types – community education, family support, child empowerment, child and family centres, and personal safety and offender programs. It will examine programs for specific population groups including indigenous communities, disability groups, and non-English-speaking background groups.

We at the Clearinghouse would like to thank everyone who has participated in the Audit, all of whom will receive a copy of the Audit Report when it is released.

*If you would like further information about the Audit please phone the National Child Protection Clearinghouse Audit Office on 1800 352 275 or (03) 9214 7888.*