

Access to early childhood education in Australia ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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This report presents AIFS research undertaken to identify gaps in access to and participation in preschool programs by Australian children in the year before full-time school. This research had the following objectives:

- review how "access" to preschool services is conceptualised and defined;
- identify the issues and factors that affect access to preschool services; and
- document and provide recommendations on how access to preschool services can be measured beyond broad performance indicators.

To meet these objectives, the publication includes a review of Australian and international literature; results of consultations across Australia; and analyses of participation of children in early childhood education using a number of Australian datasets.

The key messages identified by the study included:

- "Access" to Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Australia is considered to be more than just "participation" in ECE. It should, for example, also cover elements of quality, relevance to children. However, data are not available that would allow measurement against such a broadly defined concept of "access".
- There are difficulties and limitations in using existing survey and administrative data to measure "access" by "participation" in ECE. Nevertheless these data provide broad indications of ECE participation. Participation rates have the advantage of being easily understood and easily compared over jurisdictions and time.
- The complexity and variation in how ECE is delivered in Australia has implications for the measurement of access. This is related to different nomenclature used, and varied ages at which children are eligible to attend ECE. The different models of delivery of ECE also complicate the measurement issues, with long day care a widespread provider of ECE in some states/territories, but not others.
- Given there are difficulties in measuring access, this research used a number of datasets, to provide a fuller understanding of access across Australia.
- The analyses showed that children missing out on ECE were more often represented among disadvantaged families, and whose children are perhaps in greatest need of ECE to achieve school-readiness. The groups of children who stood out in these analyses as being less likely to be participating in ECE were Indigenous children and children from NESB backgrounds.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[4]

Tags: affordability ^[5]

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