

## 8 Child care

Families use child care services for a range of reasons, including the need to work or study, for respite and to attend to appointments and other commitments. Many families also recognise the developmental and educational benefits of child care services, which introduce children to group learning environments that may help their transition to school. Many child care services also offer family support and networking opportunities.

In Queensland, a variety of centre-based and home-based child care services are available for children and their families. The Queensland Department of Communities (formerly Families) introduced new legislation in 2003 to ensure that licensed child care services provide high quality care.

The latest national Child Care Survey (ABS, 2003b), conducted in 2002, provided a detailed profile of children using child care in Queensland. This survey (which is repeated every three years) collects information about the use of formal and informal care. Formal child care is regulated services offered outside the child's home, such as long day care, family day care, occasional care, preschool and kindergarten. Informal child care is non-regulated care, for example, from family members, friends, neighbours, paid babysitters and nannies. The survey was conducted during the school term, so does not include vacation care.

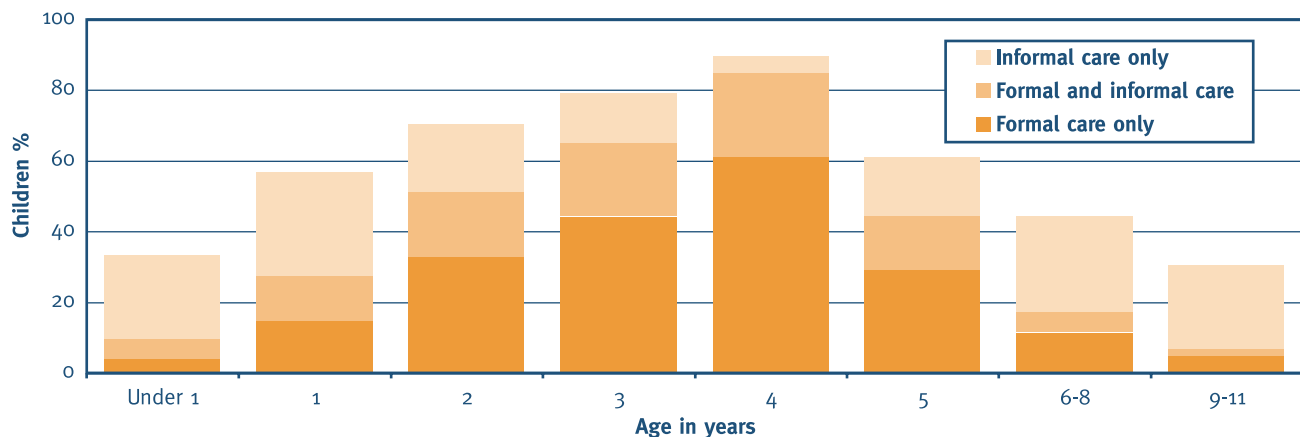
### Children in child care

Of the 607,500 children under 12 in Queensland in 2002, just over half (308,600 or 51%) were cared for by someone other than their parents in the week the survey was conducted. Of children, 19% were in formal care only, 10% in a combination of formal and informal care, and 22% were cared for using only informal care. The remaining 49% did not use any child care.

Only 10% of children under one were in formal care in 2002, with the use of formal care increasing with age to a peak of 85% for children aged four (Figure 8.1). For children at school, formal care is needed mainly before or after school and during holiday periods. Parents working part-time may not need child care outside school hours, and some children may be allowed home unsupervised or with other siblings until parents return from work.

The use of formal care showed a strong positive correlation with age up to four, and a strong negative correlation with age thereafter. The use of informal care (by relatives, babysitters or nannies) showed less variation with at least 25% of children cared for informally in each age group. The highest use of informal care was 42% of one year olds.

Figure 8.1 Children by type of care by age, Queensland, June 2002



Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia, June 2002, cat. no. 4402.0 (state tables)*

## Type of care

Of children using formal child care services, the most common service used for children under four is long day care, with family day care the next most common choice (Table 8.1). For four and five year olds, preschool (including kindergarten programs) is used more often.

**Table 8.1 Children by type of formal child care by age, Queensland, June 2002**

	Age in years							Total
	Under 1	1	2	3	4	5	6-11	
	Per cent							
Long day care centre	82	80	79	70	40	28	1	45
Family day care	20	25	18	9	7	5	6	10
Occasional care centre	—	—	2	4	1	4	—	2
Preschool	—	—	—	18	67	84	2	30
Before/after school care	—	—	—	1	3	13	90	22
Other formal care	7	2	2	2	—	—	1	1
<b>Children who used formal care<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

— Nil or rounded to zero.

a. Components do not add to total as children could use more than one type of care.

Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia, June 2002, cat. no. 4402.0 (state tables)*

Grandparents are the most commonly-used informal carers (Table 8.2).

- Grandparents provided care to 57% of the children under 12 who were cared for informally during the week the survey was conducted.
- Around two thirds of children aged 1 to 5 were cared for by grandparents.

Only a small proportion of informal care was provided by siblings, although that increased for school age children (13% of children aged 6 to 11 in informal care were cared for by brothers or sisters). About one in five children were cared for by other relatives, and a similar proportion were cared for by other people such as friends, babysitters and nannies.

**Table 8.2 Children by type of informal child care by age, Queensland, June 2002**

	Age in years							Total
	Under 1	1	2	3	4	5	6-11	
	Per cent							
Grandparent	55	68	75	67	62	67	46	57
Brother/sister	2	2	2	4	5	2	13	8
Other relative	26	20	21	27	18	16	22	22
Other person	23	17	14	8	23	21	26	21
<b>Children who used informal care<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

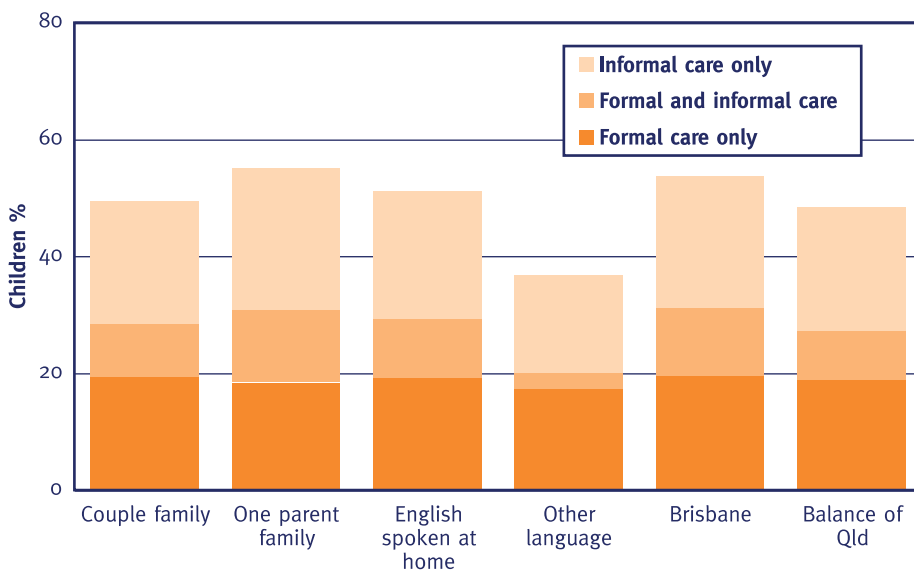
a. Components do not add to total as children could use more than one type of care.

Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia, June 2002, cat. no. 4402.0 (state tables)*

The use of child care varied depending on family characteristics and location (Figure 8.2).

- Children in single parent families were more likely to be in child care, with 55% using care compared to children in couple families (50%). The main difference was the use of informal carers. Similar proportions of children were cared for by grandparents, but other relatives such as aunts and uncles provided additional care for children in single parent families.
- Children from non-English speaking backgrounds were less likely to use child care, with only 38% using carers compared to 51% of children where the main language spoken at home was English. Factors such as whether both parents are employed and the presence of extended family or friends may reduce the need for or availability of child care.
- Children in Brisbane were more likely to be in child care (54%) compared to children elsewhere in Queensland (48%).

**Figure 8.2 Children under 12 by type of care by selected characteristics, Queensland, June 2002**



Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia, June 2002*, cat. no. 4402.0 (state tables)

## Time spent in child care

Children in long day care and family day care tended to spend the longest time in care, but this was still less than 20 hours per week for the majority – less than 20 hours care per week for 62% in long day care and 70% in family day care (Table 8.3). Thirty two per cent of children in long day care were in care 20 to 39 hours per week, and 5% were in care for 40 hours or more.

Children in other types of formal care and in informal care were in care for fewer hours.

**Table 8.3 Children in care by weekly hours of care, Queensland, June 2002**

	Hours in care							Total <sup>a</sup>
	Under 5	5-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-44	45+	
	Per cent							
Long day care centre	2	19	41	22	10	3	2	100
Family day care	9	21	40	18	8	3	2	100
Occasional care centre	26	38	35	—	—	—	—	100
Preschool	—	13	75	8	4	—	—	100
Before/after school care	57	22	19	2	—	—	—	100
Formal care	14	17	40	16	9	2	2	100
Informal care	35	24	20	9	4	1	7	100

Note: Children could use more than one type of care.

— Nil or rounded to zero.

a. Components may not add to total due to rounding.

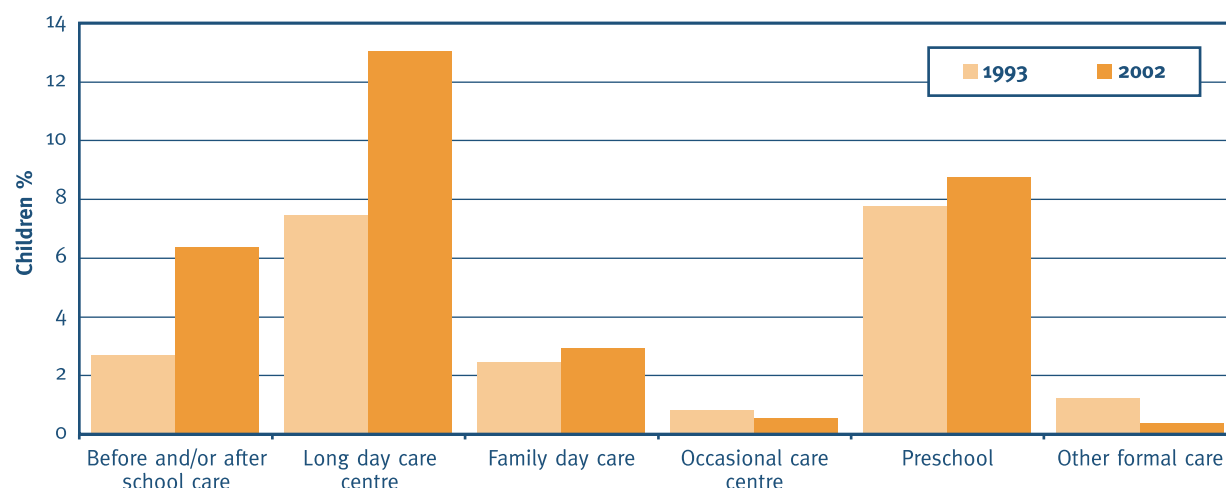
Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia, June 2002*, cat. no. 4402.0 (state tables)

## Trends

Surveys show that patterns in child care have been changing. The proportion of children under 12 in formal care increased from 21% in 1993 to 29% in 2002, while the use of informal care decreased in the same period from 57% to 39%.

The main increase in the use of formal care by children under 12 was in long day care, up from 7% to 13%, and in before and after school care changing from 3% to 6% (Figure 8.3). The main decrease in the use of informal care was that provided by people who were not relatives, which decreased from 17% of children in 1993 to only 9% in 2002.

**Figure 8.3 Children under 12 by type of formal care, Queensland, 1993 and 2002**



Note: Children may use more than one type of care.

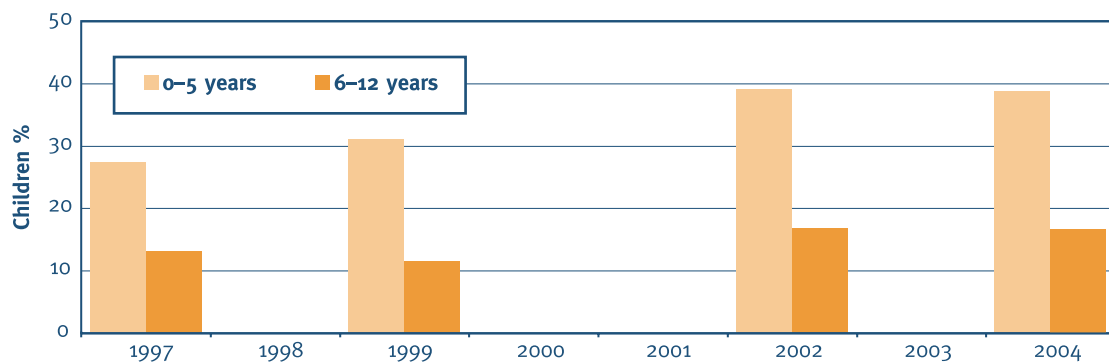
Source: ABS, *Child Care, Australia, June 1993 & June 2002*, cat. no. 4402.0

One factor influencing the use of child care has been the trend for mothers to return to work while their children are still young. The proportion of Queensland children under three in formal child care increased from 24% in 1996 to 30% in 2002 (ABS, 1999a; ABS, 2003b). Nationally, 49.5% of mothers with children under five were in the workforce in 2003, an increase from 43% in 1988.

In Queensland 52% of mothers with children under five were in the work force in June 2003.

Another source of information on child care is the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services*, which publishes information on children using government-approved child care. The proportion of children under 6 years of age in government-approved child care has increased from 27.5% in 1997 to 38.9% in 2004 (Figure 8.4). A smaller proportion of children aged 6 to 12 years use child care services, although the proportion also increased from 13.3% to 16.7% over the same period.

**Figure 8.4 Children using government approved<sup>a</sup> child care by age, Queensland 1997 to 2004<sup>b</sup>**



a. Child care services and registered carers need government approval to be eligible for Child Care Benefit funding.

b. Comparable data for 1998, 2000, 2001 and 2003 are not available.

Source: Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services*, 2005

### Availability of child care

Access to affordable child care is an ongoing issue for many families. Access to suitable child care can be even more difficult in rural and remote areas, where parents work irregular hours or rotating shifts, for infants and children under two years, or for children with special needs.

In Queensland in 2002, additional formal child care was required for 11% of children aged 0 to 4 and 3% of children aged 5 to 11 (ABS, 2003b, state tables). The national census of child care services indicated that 16% of private long day care centres and 13% of community-based long day care centres in Queensland had no vacancies (Department of Family and Community Services, 2003).

### Comments

The main trend in recent years has been the increase in use of long day care and before and after school care, driven by the increased employment rate of mothers with children under five.

Available data indicate that patterns of use of child care vary with family type and cultural background.

Where there are insufficient child care places, parents may not be able to work, may use unregulated carers, or may leave school age children unsupervised after school.