

Adoptions Australia Data Quality Statement

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Adoptions Australia Data Quality Statement

Identifying and definitional attributes

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Data quality

Summary of key issues

- The Adoptions Australia collection contains data relating to adopted children, their adoptive families and birth mothers, as well as information on the number of contact/information requests and vetoes lodged by parties to an adoption. Data are collected on intercountry, local and 'known' child adoptions. Additional data are also collected on the length of time of different intercountry adoption processes.
- The small population of the report creates a number of issues for reporting data. Proportional changes from one reporting period to the next and rates based on small numbers need to be interpreted with caution. Exploring trends over long periods (e.g. ten and twenty-five years) provides more robust results. The small population also increases the potential for attribute disclosure. Further, disaggregation of analyses by Indigenous status is not possible due to the small number of Indigenous children covered by the collection each year.
- The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) compiles the data each year using data extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments responsible for adoptions. Some data are also provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).
- Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the Adoptions Australia collection is good. Data are only partially available (one or two jurisdictions unable to provide) for 4 of the 27 collection tables and data are rarely recorded as 'unknown' in any of the collection tables.

Scope

A description of adoption and information on where the data for the collection is sourced is available in Chapter 1 of *Adoptions Australia 2011–12*. A description of the categories of adoption included in the collection is available in Section 2.1 of *Adoptions Australia 2011–12*.

The Adoptions Australia collection contains data relating to two populations of adopted children, those subject to:

- Finalisations—Children who were the subject of a finalised adoption order during the reporting period. This includes orders that were made in Australia and, in the case of some intercountry adoptions, where the full adoption order was made in the country of origin.
- Placements—Children, regardless of the status of their adoption order, who were placed with their adoptive family during the reporting period. 'Placed with their adoptive families' refers to when the child enters the home.

There can be overlap between these two groups. However, some children placed for adoption during the current period may not have their adoption finalised until a following year. In addition, some adoption orders finalised in the current period may relate to children who were placed in a previous year. However, the aggregate nature of the Adoptions Australia collection does not allow the degree of overlap to be determined.

The collection also contains data on the adoptive families and, for local adoptions, birth mothers of those children with a finalised adoption order. In addition, data on the number of contact/information requests and vetoes lodged by parties to an existing adoption are collected.

The collection is a part of the child welfare series. The agreement for ongoing funding of this series forms Schedule 3 of the National Community Services Information Infrastructure Agreement. This Agreement operates under the auspices of the Standing Council on Community and Disability Services Advisory Council (formerly the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council).

Institutional environment: Institutional environment

The AIHW is a major national agency set up by the Australian Government under the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987 to provide reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. It is an independent statutory authority established in 1987, governed by a management board and accountable to the Australian Parliament through the Health and Ageing portfolio.

The AIHW aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians through better health and welfare information and statistics. It collects and reports information on a wide range of topics and issues, ranging from health and welfare expenditure, hospitals, disease and injury, and mental health, to ageing, homelessness, disability and child protection.

The Institute also plays a role in developing and maintaining national metadata standards. This work contributes to improving the quality and consistency of national health and welfare statistics. The Institute works closely with governments and non-government organisations to achieve greater adherence to those standards in administrative data collections to promote national consistency and comparability of data and reporting.

One of the main functions of the AIHW is to work with the states and territories to improve the quality of administrative data and, where possible, to compile national data sets based on data from each jurisdiction, to analyse the datasets and disseminate information and statistics.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act, in conjunction with the compliance provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 (Cwth), ensures that the data collections managed by the AIHW are kept securely and under the strictest conditions to preserve privacy and confidentiality.

For further information, see the AIHW website <www.aihw.gov.au>.

Timeliness:**Timeliness**

The reference period for the 2011–12 Adoptions Australia collection is from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012. The data set includes information related to all intercountry, local and 'known' adoption orders finalised during this period as well as limited information on placements that took place during this period.

The state and territory departments responsible for adoption provide data to the AIHW annually, following the end of each financial year. For the 2011–12 collection, the first iteration of data was due to the AIHW about 6 weeks after the end of the financial year (by 15 August 2012), and data were finalised for all states and territories in September 2012.

The data for each collection period are released in the AIHW's Adoptions Australia annual publication. In 2011–12, concurrent with the annual publication, key findings will also be released in an online dashboard.

Data from the Adoptions Australia collection are expected to be published in December of the final year of the reference period (within 6 months after the end of the reference period).

Accessibility:**Accessibility**

Publications containing Adoptions Australia data, including the annual Adoptions Australia reports and online dashboard, are available on the AIHW website <<http://www.aihw.gov.au>>. These reports are available free of charge.

Requests for unpublished data can be made by contacting the AIHW on (02) 6244 1000 or via email to <info@aihw.gov.au>. A cost recovery charge may apply to requests that take longer to compile. Depending on the nature of the request, requests for access to unpublished data may require approval from the State and Territory data custodians and/or the AIHW Ethics Committee.

General inquiries about AIHW publications can be made to the Communications, Media and Marketing Unit on (02) 6244 1032 or via email to <info@aihw.gov.au>.

Interpretability:**Interpretability**

Supporting information on relevant legislation and jurisdictional policy are presented in Appendix B of *Adoptions Australia 2011–12*. Supporting information is also provided in the footnotes accompanying tables and the reports glossary. The Attorney General's Department (AGD)—the Australian Central Authority for intercountry adoption—provides expert advice on current intercountry adoption programs which is incorporated into the report to inform and contextualise analyses. Chapter 2 of the report provides an overview of the three types of adoption in the report and further contextual information. Readers are advised to consider all supporting and contextual information to ensure appropriate interpretation of analyses presented by the AIHW.

Metadata for the Adoptions Australia collection is currently under collation by the AIHW's metadata team for entry on to METeOR, the AIHW's online metadata repository.

Relevance:**Relevance**

The Adoptions Australia collection is the authoritative source of national adoptions data for Australia. In addition to providing information on the current period, the collection also allows for comparable trend data to be examined. As part of the 'child welfare' schedule under the National Community Services Information Infrastructure Agreement, the collection is a valuable source for monitoring the role of adoption as part of Australia's response to issues of child welfare and safety.

Each year the data collection includes information related to intercountry, local and 'known' adoption placements and finalisations that occurred during the reporting period (i.e. the 2011–12 reporting period would include data from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012). These data allow for analyses of adopted child, the adoptive families and, for local adoptions, birth mothers of those children with a finalised adoption order to be reported each year. The collection also allows data on the number of contact/information requests and vetoes lodged by parties to an existing adoption to be examined. In addition, data from DIAC on the number of visas issued for expatriate adoption and the countries of origin for these adoptions provides complementary information. When combined these data give a detailed view of adoption in Australia.

Accuracy:**Accuracy**

Data for the Adoptions Australia collection are extracted each year from the administrative systems of the Australian state and territory departments responsible for adoption, according to definitions and technical specifications agreed by the departments and the AIHW.

Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the collection are good. In 2011–12, of the 27 data tables in the aggregate collection only 4 did not contain data for all jurisdictions. Queensland and New South Wales were unable to provide data for two tables, and Western Australia was unable to provide data for one table. In 2011–12, only 4 tables contain data recorded as 'unknown' and in only one of these tables did the 'unknown' category comprise more than 5% of the data supplied.

Due to the small size of the population covered by the collection the potential for the appearance of small cells is high. However, the risk of sensitive attribute disclosure is considered low. The reasons for this are:

- Most report tables are aggregated to a national level.
- The possibility of an observed placement not to be finalised in the year it occurred (making the population of finalised adoption orders contain within a report difficult to observe and, therefore, it is difficult to determine if information about an observed adopted person is present in a particular report).

Most variables are considered of low sensitivity by national, state and territory adoption authorities; and, some data are put in the public domain at a similar level of disaggregation by these authorities.

Coherence:

Coherence

The Adoptions Australia collection was initially developed in 1993. The report series started when AIHW took over the national adoptions data collection in 1993. The first three editions were published in 1993 and 1994 (as data were collected back to 1990–91), and from 1995 one edition has been released annually. Prior to this, national adoptions data were collected and reported (briefly) by two other organisations: WELSTAT (1987–88 to 1989–90) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 1979–80 to 1984–85). No national data were collected in 1985–86 and 1986–87, resulting in a break in trend data for these years.

From the 1998–99 report onwards, the categories of adoption used in the Adoptions Australia publications differ from those in previous publications. The categories were changed to better reflect the types of adoptions that occur, and to bring the terminology more in line with that used by state and territory departments responsible for adoption. However, the new categories of adoption introduced in 1998–99 are still able to be mapped to those reported prior to this period, allowing a break in trend data to be avoided. Refer to *Adoptions Australia 2008–09* for further details.

Those tables that have been consistently collected from 1990–91 onwards are comparable. In addition, data standards were carried over from the ABS Adoptions Standards (March 1982) allowing comparable data from the years prior to the AIHW collection to be incorporated into trends reporting. The report series uses the long history of data collection to analyse trends over a 25 year period in order to capture the effect of changes to local and international societal views and policies.

In 2003–04, additional tables on the intercountry adoption process were included in the Adoptions Australia national collection template. However, prior to 2011–12 these data were not published as part of the Adoptions Australia report. In 2011–12, by agreement with the state and territory data custodians, these data were incorporated into the Adoptions Australia report (including trend data back to 2007–08).

From 2000 to 2007 the AIHW also provided the AGD with a detailed report on finalised intercountry adoptions from Hague countries as part of Australia's reporting responsibilities under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. In 2008–09, tables with continuing relevance were incorporated into the main Adoptions Australia report and the separate report was ceased.

In 2010, the AGD department also began collecting data on activity in each intercountry adoption program from the States and Territories on a six-monthly basis. The data are reported on a calendar year basis and include the total number of approved intercountry adoption applications, files sent overseas and placement proposals. The AIHW Adoptions Australia report does not include placement proposals. Placement proposals refer to when a partner country matches a child (or children) with Australian parents, and a formal placement proposal is sent to Australia. Placement proposals do not always refer to a single child—a proposal may refer to a sibling group, and there will be a delay between a placement proposal being accepted and the child arriving in Australia. While both the AGD collection and Adoptions Australia collection contain information on the number of adoption applications and files sent overseas, there are differences in the reporting periods of the two collections and in the definitions underlying the data. For example, the AGD count of applications is for the calendar year and includes applications with an assigned country of origin already sent and waiting overseas and applications approved but queued in Australian. In contrast, the applications data reported in the Adoptions Australia reports are for the financial year and include only new applications approved by the department during this period, regardless of whether a country of origin has been assigned. Therefore, caution should be exercised when comparing these data.

Data products

Implementation start date: 14/12/2012

Source and reference attributes

Submitting organisation: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

Relational attributes

Related metadata references:

Has been superseded by [Adoptions Australia Data Quality Statement 2013–14 AIHW Data Quality Statements](#), Superseded 16/12/2015