

Selectivity in Children's Services Policy

Author:

Jones, Andrew

Publication details:

Working Paper No. 32
Reports and Proceedings
0858233096 (ISBN)

Publication Date:

1983

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/965>

License:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/au/>

Link to license to see what you are allowed to do with this resource.

Downloaded from <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.4/45278> in <https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au> on 2024-04-23

SWRC Reports and Proceedings

No 32

June 1983

SELECTIVITY IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY

Andrew Jones



Social Welfare Research Centre

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

P.O. Box 1, Kensington, New South Wales, Australia 2033

SWRC REPORTS AND PROCEEDINGS

No.32

June 1983

SELECTIVITY IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY

by

ANDREW JONES

ISSN 0159 9607

ISBN 0 858 23309 6

Social Welfare Research Centre
The University of New South Wales
P.O. Box 1, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033, Australia

As with all issues in the Reports and Proceedings series, the views expressed in this number do not necessarily represent any official position on the part of the Centre. The Reports and Proceedings are produced to make available the research findings of the individual authors, and to promote the development of ideas and discussion about major areas of concern in the field of Social Welfare.

CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Introduction	1
I Implementing Selectivity: The Case of the Commonwealth Children's Services Program	3
II Resource Allocation at the Periphery: The Role of Direct Service Organisations in Distributing Early Childhood Services	37
Bibliography	67

FOREWORD

Since its inception the Social Welfare Research Centre has had a team studying the welfare of young children, and in particular, issues of child care. Research undertaken by this team has been highly regarded, and the Centre has been a focus for many of those working in this field. Andrew Jones spent some time in the SWRC in mid-1981 working in particular with Tania Sweeney on a range of child care research issues. The material that appears in this monograph was shaped during that visit when Andrew Jones worked through the Centre's holdings and laid the foundations for a more extensive study. His project has developed considerably since then with funding from the Australian Research Grants Scheme, and with a Special Projects Grant and a University Grant from the University of Queensland. Entitled "Studies in Child Care Policy", the project examines a range of aspects of children's services policy at Commonwealth, State and local level.

In this paper Andrew Jones makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the concept of "selectivity", and the model he has constructed has wide applications. Given the framework which is developed in the first section, the second section presents a thorough analysis of resource allocation in early childhood services in Townsville, North Queensland. The knowledgeable reader will note immediately that there are great differences between the states in child care policy, provision, and perception of those working in the field. Furthermore, the pursuit of selectivity has resulted in a plethora of services which, in operation, are often not flexible enough to meet the needs of children and their families. This has created a host of problems for both the service providers and the users.

The material contained here was the basis of two presentations Andrew Jones made to the 53rd ANZAAS Congress, held in Perth in May 1983. Given his close connection with the Centre and the relevance of these papers to the Centre's work it was decided to publish them in our Reports and Proceedings series. Many of the issues raised here are examined further in a report by Tania Sweeney, Frances Staden and Adam Jamrozik entitled "Experience of Childrens' Services: The Perspective of Parents and Providers" due for publication in this series in August 1983.

Adam Graycar
Director
Social Welfare Research Centre

INTRODUCTION

In 1974 the Commonwealth Government adopted the policy that all Australian families with young children should have available to them a comprehensive range of early childhood services, including, in particular, child care. This objective, as is well known, has not been achieved. Only a minority of Australian families in the early 1980s has access to, and uses, formal child care services. This discrepancy between the aims of the early 1970s and the outcomes of the early 1980s stems from both political and economic factors. Between 1976 and 1983, the Commonwealth limited its objectives in the early childhood field to providing services to "those in greatest need", rejecting the aim of universal provision of child care on ideological grounds. The relatively poor state of the economy during these years reinforced this policy of limited involvement in children's services. The return of a Labor Government in March 1983 may result in a return to a commitment to the objective of universal service provision; however, given prevailing economic circumstances and economic policy, it is unlikely that universal access to children's services will be a reality in the near future.

In such circumstances, policies concerning the distribution of children's services assume great importance. The two central questions that policy-makers face are:

1. Which kinds of families should be the main recipients of those child care services that are made available through public funds?
2. What strategies will maximise the likelihood that services in fact reach the intended beneficiaries?

Given that children's services will be in short supply for the foreseeable future, these issues must be addressed irrespective of whether the policy-maker is committed to universal or partial public provision of children's services.

In this report, these issues are described as issues of "selectivity". The term "selectivity" is used here in a broad sense to include all measures designed to allocate services to selected groups of the population who are deemed to have needs or characteristics that should be recognised in the form of priority or special consideration. The first section explores the development of selectivity as a policy objective in the Commonwealth Government's Children's Services Program. It addresses two questions:

1. What meanings have been given to selectivity by those responsible for the children's services program?
2. What strategies have been used to implement selectivity, and with what effects and consequences?

In the second section, the focus switches to the local level, and in particular to the level of the direct service organisation. It is argued in this paper that the policies of child care centres and other early childhood services organisations have an important bearing on which families do, and which families do not, receive children's services. The kinds of agency policies that affect the distribution of services are described, and illustrative data are provided from a study of the allocative policies of early childhood service organisations located in Townsville, Queensland. The argument is made strongly that there is a need for more explicit attention to be paid to the policies and processes that affect the allocation of child care resources.

I IMPLEMENTING SELECTIVITY:
 THE CASE OF THE COMMONWEALTH
 CHILDREN'S SERVICE PROGRAM

Introduction

A continuing theme in the history of the Commonwealth Government's involvement in the field of children's services since 1972 has been the aspiration to "concentrate resources on those whose needs are greatest". Liberal and Labor Ministers have all argued that Commonwealth funds for child care should be directed on a selective basis to families and children in greatest need, and since 1976 much effort has been expended by the Office of Child Care in the Department of Social Security in devising means of implementing this policy objective. The aim of this paper is to examine the complexities of this persistent aim, and thus to clarify the policy choices available to decision makers on this issue. In particular, the paper will focus on the administrative issues involved in implementing selectivity in the field of children's services.

Two questions are addressed:

1. What meanings have been given to selectivity in children's services?
2. What strategies have been used to implement selectivity, and with what effects and consequences?

Before examining these issues it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the development of the Children's Services Program, and of the general issue of selectivity in social service provision.

The Commonwealth Children's Services Program

Ongoing Commonwealth Government involvement in the field of early childhood care and education began with the passage of the Child Care Act in 1972. Various factors led to the introduction of this measure at that time, including the increasing proportion of married women with dependent children entering the paid workforce during the 1950s and 1960s, the emergence of the women's movement as a significant political force, the concerns of some employers to attract and retain female labour, the success of the pre-school lobby in drawing public attention to the value of educational experiences for children in the years prior to school attendance, and the immediate electoral

problems of the then Coalition Government (Spearritt, 1977). The Child Care Act provided for financial assistance to non-profit organisations, including local government, to establish and operate child care centres for children of working parents. Financial assistance could take several forms: unmatched capital grants; recurrent grants to subsidise employment of qualified staff and fees for children in special need groups; and grants for research and evaluation. A relatively small sum of \$4.8 million was initially allocated to the scheme, but official statements and the Act itself gave the impression that an ongoing and increasing Commonwealth involvement in child care was planned.

The Labor Government that came into office in December 1972 was committed to major expansion of child care and pre-school services, and during its period of government, expenditures in this field increased rapidly, reaching \$63.9 million in 1975-76 (Sweeney and Jamrozik, 1982: 101). The period 1973-1975 was characterised by extensive debate over the aims and means of implementation of children's services policy. Debate focussed on a range of issues including whether priority should be given to day care or early childhood education, whether family support or child development should be the principal aim, whether professionalism or community involvement and control should be stressed, whether early childhood services should be made available on a universal or a selective basis, and whether planning should primarily take place on a centralised or decentralised basis. These issues were to a large extent still unresolved when the Labor Government was defeated in the election of December 1975.

During the period of office of the Coalition Government from 1975-83 the Children's Services Program was maintained, although expenditure steadily declined in real terms each year excepting 1982-83 (Sweeney and Jamrozik, 1982: 101). This decline was consistent with the Coalition Government's general policies of reducing public expenditure and restricting the role of the Commonwealth in fields, such as children's services, that are traditionally and constitutionally the primary responsibility of the States. There was an emphasis during the late 1970s on funding a diverse range of children's services, which changed in the early 1980s to an emphasis on full day care services. Pre-schools were specifically identified as a State Government responsibility, and Commonwealth expenditure on pre-schools was accordingly reduced. Service provision via funding of non-profit, non-government organisations remained the main means whereby child care services were made

available, but some moves were made toward subsidising commercial, non-profit child care organisations. Funds for pre-schools have been channelled through State Governments since 1977. There was an emphasis on the need to restrict Commonwealth subsidies, where possible, to low income and needy families. The Labor Opposition continued throughout this period to stress its commitment to extensive community provision, via Commonwealth expenditure, of early childhood services (Commonwealth Record, 1981: 1619-1620). It is as yet too early to judge how this commitment will be translated into specific policies and programs by the Labor Government that assumed office in March 1983.

In summary, the Commonwealth since 1972 has provided limited funds, primarily to non-government organisations, for a range of early childhood services. There has been an ongoing debate concerning the types of services that should be provided, the extent of provision, the means through which services should be made available, and the target groups that should receive subsidised services. It is this last issue - who should receive subsidised children's services? - that is the concern of this paper.

Selectivity in Social Service Provision

The term "selectivity" is most commonly used to refer to the principle of allocating social provisions by reference to a test of means or income in order to decide eligibility and/or the level of charge to be levied. The opposite principle of "universality" implies the provision of services to an entire population as a social right, without direct regard to their income. The arguments for applying one principle or the other, or a combination of both, have been discussed extensively, particularly by British writers (George and Wilding, 1976: 78-80; Jones, Brown and Bradshaw, 1978: 44-58; Titmuss, 113-123; Townsend, 1968: 1-6). In the Australian context Horne, Harper, and Buchanan have provided a useful review of the extent, variety and effects of the use of means tests in Australian social programs (1978), and Jamrozik has analysed the central policy issues (1983).

More broadly, the term "selectivity" can be used to describe all measures designed to provide services to selected groups of the population who are deemed to have needs or characteristics that should be recognised in the form of priority or special consideration. Used in this less specific way, selectivity can involve a range of policy measures designed to target services on particular social groups including non-income related eligibility criteria,

granting priority to certain groups to enable them to "jump the queue", providing services in localities where target groups reside, and attempts to increase take-up of services by particular groups. Income and means tests, according to this broader notion of selectivity, are but one means of channelling services to target groups. It is in this broader sense that the term "selectivity" is used in this paper. The reasons for this usage in this context stem from the nature of the Children's Service Program, which has been characterised by a wide variety of attempts to focus resources on "the needy". Income tests have been but one aspect, albeit an important aspect, of the policy makers' attempts to select the Program's recipients.

A useful framework for analysing the various approaches to selectivity that have been adopted in the Children's Services Program is Gilbert and Specht's classification of the principles on which social allocations can be made (1974: 54-80). After commenting on the "confounding variables that enter the universal - selective distinction" (55), Gilbert and Specht suggest that social allocations may be made according to four allocative principles: attributed need, compensation, diagnostic differentiation, and means-tested need. With attributed need, eligibility is determined according to membership of a category of people whose "needs" are deemed, according to some normative standard, not to be met by existing societal arrangements. All single parent families, or all families in which both parents work, might be considered in need of child care according to this principle. Compensation involves eligibility being conditional on membership of a social group that has suffered some unmerited disservice due to social circumstances. Arguments that Aboriginal families or families in isolated areas have a priority need for child care could fall into this category. Diagnostic differentiation involves eligibility being conditional upon professional judgements that a service is needed to enhance an individual's or a family's well-being. Attempts to give priority in child care centres and programs to families in various crisis situations, or to enhance the development of a child with learning or social disabilities, are examples of this approach. Finally, means-tested need involves allocating services to families whose income and/or resources fall beneath a certain standard. The argument that low income families be given priority access to children's services is an example of this approach. A possible fifth allocative principle, subsumed by Gilbert and Specht under the "compensation" category, is merit or reward. For example, it might be argued that those who pay the highest taxes should have priority in the allocation of government-supported child care places.

"Selectivity" can, therefore, be based on a range of different criteria, and can be implemented by a variety of policy measures. Using the above distinctions, let us now attempt to disentangle the various notions of selectivity that have been espoused during the last decade of Commonwealth Government involvement in children's services.

Notions of Selectivity in the Children's Services Program

A review of the development of the Children's Services Program shows that the aspiration to selectivity, couched in rhetorical phrases such as "concentrating resources on those whose needs are greatest", has taken a variety of forms. Four phases, in which different notions of selectivity were dominant, can be distinguished. These can be described as:

1. Multiple Selectivity, 1972.
2. Selectivity in the Context of Universal Aspirations, 1973-75.
3. Selectivity Re-Asserted, 1976-1980.
4. Selectivity Embraced, 1981-1983.

Each of these phases will now be briefly described.

Multiple Selectivity, 1972

The Child Care Bill was introduced into the House of Representatives by the Minister for Labour and National Service on 10th October, 1972. The contents of the Bill, and the Minister's second reading speech, made it clear that the proposed initiative was to be a selective one, focussed on particular target groups in the population. The first paragraph of the Minister's speech concluded with the statement that the Bill was "designed as a humanitarian measure with particular concern being directed to those in need" (House of Representatives, Debates, Vol. 81, 1972: 2288). The rhetoric of selectivity had begun.

The form that selectivity would take was, however, less clear. Four different approaches to determining which children were "in need" of child care can be identified in the Act and in the Minister's speech. Firstly, it was stated that the children of working mothers were the main target group of the legislation. The Minister stressed that the main impetus for the Bill

was the concern that increased participation by mothers in the paid workforce was resulting in many young children being left without adequate care and supervision (the need to meet the requirements of employers for female labour was not mentioned, although this was clearly another important factor). He implied that government action had been taken reluctantly, and should not be construed as a measure either to encourage or discourage mothers from entering paid employment. Rather, it was a measure concerned primarily with the well-being of children. There was, however, no notion in the Minister's speech of universal access to child care facilities for all children of working parents. The level of funding provided and envisaged was sufficient only to provide care for a small proportion of the target population, and no detailed long-term plan was presented to meet the needs of all children of working parents in the country. It was emphasised that government-supported child care facilities would charge for their services: the measures introduced in the Bill were intended only to increase the availability and quality of child care centres. In short, the Bill was a reluctant and partial measure in which children of working mothers were perceived as the main beneficiaries.

Further evidence of the intended beneficiaries of the Program was provided in Section 12 of the Act which identified four groups of children considered to be "in special need". The four groups were children of one parent families, of families in the first three years of settlement in Australia, of families where one of the parents was sick or incapacitated, and of low income families. These groups were to receive special treatment in two ways. Firstly, grants were to be made to child care centres to enable centres to reduce fees for the "special need" children, although the way in which this would operate was not made clear. A proposed amendment to the Bill to include physically and mentally handicapped children as "special need" children for purposes of the Act was not accepted by the Government (House of Representatives, Debates, Vol. 81, 1972: 3055).

The third element in selecting the beneficiaries of the Program was implied in the Minister's suggestion that centres receiving grants might be required to co-operate with family counselling and other social welfare agencies in situations involving family disruption (House of Representatives, Debates, Vol. 81, 1972: 2292). The notion that child care centres be used in family situations diagnosed as requiring, or likely to benefit from, day care of young children was thus introduced, although not elaborated, in the initial explanation of the purposes of the Bill. Finally, it was stated that there

would be an attempt to locate new child care centres in "areas of greatest social need". A notion of geographic selectivity was thus introduced into the scheme.

In summary, the Child Care Act of 1972 was, in intent, multiply selective. The main target group identified was children of working mothers (the needs of other parents and children for children's services were only mentioned in passing). However, the level of funds provided meant that only a small proportion of the target group would be reached. Certain types of children were to receive priority and reduced fees, on the basis either of low income or of other identified needs (incapacitated parents, lone parent families, or recent immigrants). Children from disrupted families were also envisaged as beneficiaries, as were children from localities of social need. Thus, the basis for allocation of child care services included (to use Gilbert and Specht's terms) attributed need, means-tested need, and diagnostic differentiation. The policy was neither aimed at meeting the needs of all children of working parents, nor confined exclusively to them, nor targetted solely on such special need groups as single parent families and migrants, nor reliant on an income test as the sole or main grounds of eligibility. The means of implementing the various conceptions of selectivity inherent in the program were only considered at a most general level. These initial confusions as to whom the intended beneficiaries of the program should be were exacerbated when, less than two months after the passage of the legislation, the Labor Government came into office committed to a complex mixture of selective and universal aspirations in the field of early childhood services.

Selectivity in the Context of Universal Aspirations, 1973-1975

The early childhood policies espoused by the Labor Party in the lead up to the 1972 election were markedly at variance with the provisions and intentions of the Child Care Act of 1972. Labor policy had two emphases: universal availability of pre-school education in the year prior to school attendance, and limited provision of child care centres. The first of these aims was clearly dominant and was viewed as a major strategy for reducing social inequality. Child care facilities were seen as of secondary importance, and the 1972 election policy speech made only a general reference to developing child care centres "beginning in areas where the need is most acute" (Whitlam, 1977: 267 and 275-6). This approach, based on universal provision of pre-schools and selective provision of child care (on criteria

not clearly established), was reflected in the terms of reference given to the Australian Pre-Schools Committee, established early in 1973 to provide a plan for implementation of the Government's early childhood policies. The Committee was charged to make recommendations to ensure that:

1. the objective is achieved over a period of approximately six years that all children are given an opportunity to undertake a year of pre-school education;
2. child care centres for children below school age are established to meet the needs of children of working parents and under-privileged families (Australia. Pre-Schools Committee, 1975: xi).

The Committee was also charged to give priority to the establishment of facilities in localities where the need was greatest. In short, initial Labor policy favoured further development of child care centres on similar selective lines as those envisaged in the Child Care Act, but far greater emphasis on universal pre-school education.

The Committee's report, presented in December 1973, was consistent with its terms of reference, and proposed a plan involving sessional pre-school opportunities for up to seventy per cent of children in the year prior to school attendance, and day care services for up to ten per cent of children of pre-school age. The report contained the first detailed attempt to clarify the meaning of selectivity in early childhood services in Australia. "Children in need" were defined as "those with physical, intellectual and emotional handicaps and those whose early environment, to a significant degree, happens not to prepare them to make full use of the educational opportunities which will subsequently become available to them" (1974: 25). Two types of need were identified: need arising from locality, and need arising from individual circumstances. Localities giving rise to need were identified as inner city areas, new housing developments, new towns and cities, flats and high rise dwellings, migrant communities, Aboriginal communities, and remote and isolated communities. Individual circumstances giving rise to need included handicapped children, children from single parent families and from families where both parents worked, children from families in distress, children in institutions, and isolated children (1974: 25-27). In most of these categories need was defined in terms of lack of opportunity for educational development, although

the need for child care was emphasised in relation to new towns, children from families in distress, and children from single parent families and families where both parents worked. The main strategies to overcome these needs were provision of opportunities for disadvantaged children to attend pre-schools for longer periods and more frequently, priority in establishing early childhood services in localities of high need, specialist services for groups such as handicapped children, migrant children, and Aboriginal children, and continuation of the provisions of the Child Care Act relating to subsidised fees and priority admission for needy children to government funded services (1974: 136-145).

The main strategy of the Pre-Schools Committee could thus be described as one of positive discrimination, within a context of universal access, designed to overcome educational (and thus social) inequality. Child care was viewed as a service to be provided selectively, primarily to children from single parent families and families where both parents worked. In terms of clarifying the bases of social allocations in the early childhood area the report was an advance on the rather muddled thinking associated with the introduction of the Child Care Act of 1972. However, the definition of "need" outlined in the Committee's report was challenged during 1973-1974 by groups stressing that the needs of women, parents, and families, as well as children, should be met by early childhood services, and arguing that educational factors should not be viewed as primary considerations.

These latter views came to prominence at the 1973 Labor Party National Conference which, after much debate, adopted as party policy that "a comprehensive child care system should be established throughout Australia on a priority needs basis... the aims of the service to be to provide community support for women to participate more fully in society" (Spearritt, 1979: 30-31). This objective was additional to the existing policy of universal access to pre-schools, and thus committed the Labor Party to the goal of universal provision of both child care and pre-schools. The Pre-Schools Committee report, published several months after the National Conference, clearly did not accord with this new aim, and a further report was commissioned by the Labor Government in early 1974 to review the whole area of pre-school and day care services. This report by the Social Welfare Commission, presented to Parliament in July 1974, argued the case for comprehensive provision of a range of early childhood services including pre-school education centres, child care centres, family day care programs, play-groups,

toddlers groups, and other services as required. Planning of services was to take place at a local level, but the Commonwealth Government was to accept overall responsibility for ensuring services were funded and provided. The objective was universal access to a range of support services for families with young children (Australia. Social Welfare Commission: 1974).

Although its emphasis was on universal provision of early childhood services, the Social Welfare Commission's report maintained the emphasis of earlier policies on providing "priority of access to those children and families most in need" (1974: 96). It recommended continued support of those services being funded under the Child Care Act of 1972, and implicitly accepted the special need categories listed in that legislation. Its main approaches to selecting those most "in need" were, however, geographic and categorical. It recommended that all localities in Australia be given a socio-economic rating 1-5. Lower socio-economic localities (rated 1) would be given priority: "capital and recurrent assistance (should be provided) on a differential basis, discriminating positively (in areas) of most need" (1974: 96). In addition, certain categories of families and children were identified as requiring additional and special provisions because they were "less likely than others to gain access to an early childhood service" (1974: 98). The "special need" groups singled out for attention were handicapped children, children of migrant families, Aboriginal families, geographically isolated families and children, and one-parent families. In general, it was argued that these groups required both priority consideration in general early childhood services and special services and facilities to meet their particular needs. It is noteworthy that low income families were not identified as a "special need" group as such, and there were no recommendations in the report concerning income or means tests. The implied assumption was that in a policy of universal provision, with priority going to localities and categories of people with special needs, there was no need or place for income testing.

Most of the recommendations of the Social Welfare Commission, particularly those concerned with identifying areas and groups with special needs, were accepted as Government policy in the second half of 1974 (Australian Government Digest, 1974: 1248-1253). However, the \$130 million promised by the Labor Government in the 1974 election campaign to implement the Children's Services Program was cut to \$75 million in the August 1974 budget. Despite this setback a Bill was introduced into Parliament in 1975 to establish a

Children's Commission to generally develop children's services, and specifically, to "take part in planning to achieve the availability, throughout Australia, of a comprehensive range of services for children". In exercising this function the Commission was charged with "ensuring that services for children were available to meet all needs for such services", but also with "ensuring that priority is given to the provision of services for children in circumstances where the greatest need for those services exists". The Commission was also to attempt to "meet the needs of children suffering disadvantages for social, economic, health, ethnic, locational, cultural, lingual, or other reasons" (Children's Commission Act, 1975, Sect.5). The Bill was passed by the Parliament, but before it could be put into effect the Labor Government was removed from office.

The debate over the bases of allocation of children's service was overshadowed, during 1973-75, by the debate over what types of services (educational or care) should be allocated. Nevertheless, it was clear that a very different approach had been articulated. Selectivity, in the sense of certain groups receiving priority or special consideration, had been retained as a central policy goal. But it was to be pursued in a context of commitment to comprehensive provision, albeit limited by budgetary considerations, of a range of early childhood services for all families with young children. Geographic areas of need, and special need groups, were to receive priority, but income testing was not adopted as a major strategy to achieve target effectiveness. This policy of positive discrimination within a universal framework did not, however, survive the change of government in December 1975. The return of the Coalition Government resulted in the re-assertion of an altogether narrower notion of selectivity.

Selectivity Re-Asserted, 1976-1980

The broad policy emphases of the new Government were to reduce public expenditure and restrict the role of the Commonwealth in fields traditionally the responsibility of the States. In the field of children's services to all families with young children, this was done quite explicitly. The newly appointed Director of the Office of Child Care, outlining government policy at a conference in July 1976, stated:

In times of stringent cutbacks in public sector spending as at present, popular thought moves away from a universalist approach to social welfare to

a more selective approach - that of ensuring that scarce government resources are provided in such a way that they reach the people in most need (Coleman, 1976: 5).

The Children's Commission Act, with its emphasis on universal provision, was not implemented. Every policy statement by the new Minister for Social Security, into whose portfolio children's services was placed, now emphasised that the main aim of the children's services program was to provide services to children of families most in need (e.g. Commonwealth Record, 1976: 1300-1304; Guilfoyle, 1977; Guilfoyle, 1978; Guilfoyle, 1979).

This unambiguous rejection of all aspirations to universality was implemented by different means in different areas of the program. Pre-school education was explicitly defined as a State Government responsibility, and Commonwealth funds for pre-schools were from 1977 channelled through the States in the form of block grants rather than, as previously, directly to individual services. The level of funding to pre-schools steadily diminished in real terms. One condition of these funds provided to the States was that the States should "aim at providing access to pre-schooling services for children in most need" (Guilfoyle, 1977: 4). However, little attempt was made to enforce this provision. No emphasis was given to the role of pre-schools in achieving educational or social equality.

In relation to child care and related support services for families, the Commonwealth role was presented as one of "giving a boost as required, to areas and services in particular need of assistance", "stimulating innovatory thinking and activity among State, local government, and non-government organisations", and "contributing to high priority services for groups and communities with special needs" (Commonwealth Record, 1976: 192 and 1301; 1979: 342). This oft-repeated emphasis on allocation in accord with "special need" was not, however, accompanied by any clear statements as to what the bases for allocation should be. Typically, need was defined simply by listing a series of groups judged to be needy. In 1977, for example, the Minister wrote:

What ... does the Office of Child Care mean when it says that priority is given to providing assistance for projects serving areas or individuals most in need? In a broad definition of need it includes children of families in socio-economic need; children with particular needs such as the handicapped, geographically isolated children, some Aborigines and immigrants, and children considered to be "at risk", or likely to be admitted to residential care. It also includes children

of single working parents and children from districts with an inadequate level of community resources and services (Guilfoyle, 1977: 3-4).

This list of target groups varied from time to time. In another prepared statement in 1978 "children both of whose parents are in the workforce", was added to the list, and children from deprived districts were removed (Guilfoyle, 1978: 3; Sweeney and Jamrozik, 1982: 87-88). This generalised approach to defining need, which could be described as "undifferentiated selectivity", was justified in terms of flexibility:

Need of course is hard to define...there is no specific definition of need within the Children's Services Program. This is not necessarily a defect, as the Government does not wish to be locked into a rigid definition which could well exclude many because of lack of flexibility (Guilfoyle, 1977: 3).

The difficulties of defining need are undeniable. However, a more rigorous approach might have been expected of a government so firmly committed to the principle of selectivity. Firstly, some indication of which "need" categories had highest priority would have provided a clearer basis for decision making, particularly as the lists of those in need contained such diverse groups. Secondly, some indication of the rationale for defining groups in need would have shed light on the government's intentions. Sweeney and Jamrozik have shown, for example, that no clear reasons were spelt out for giving priority to groups such as migrants or lone parent families (1982: 89). Thirdly, there was no clear distinction amongst the different bases for social allocations. Defining "children of working parents" as a need category suggested allocation based on "attributed need". References to Aboriginal children, geographically isolated children, and children from districts with an inadequate level of community services implied notions of "compensation". "Diagnostic differentiation" was clearly implied by including in the lists, "children who are 'at risk' of maltreatment, and children whose family is likely to break down with the resultant admission of the child to residential care" (Guilfoyle, 1978: 3). Economic need ("means tested" need in Gilbert and Specht's terms) was a continually repeated theme. There is no necessary objection to a program which involves such multiple criteria; but failure to recognise and spell out the distinctions is misleading. Finally, there was no notion in Commonwealth policy between 1976 and 1980 of comprehensive provision to any of the special need categories listed, nor any public attempts to estimate the level of provision necessary to meet the needs of any

of the groups in an overall sense. The policy was one of partial selectivity.

In summary, the years 1976-1980 were marked by a re-assertion of selectivity as the main theme of Commonwealth children's services policy. It was not, however, a policy involving clear articulation of the bases of allocation of resources, nor was there any stated intention to make comprehensive provision for those considered to be in special need. Rather, phrases such as "giving priority in service provision to those in need", were used in a more general rhetorical sense to emphasize that the Commonwealth viewed its role as limited and circumscribed.

Selectivity Embraced, 1981-1983

In November 1980 the Commonwealth Government established the Committee for Review of Commonwealth Government Functions with a brief to recommend reduction, elimination, or alteration of government programs, or transfer of programs to the States or private enterprise. Although the Committee did not recommend the inclusion of the Children's Services Program in the list of functions recommended for relinquishing by the Commonwealth, it did precipitate a review of the program. An internal working committee, chaired by Mr. J. Spender, M.H.R., a Liberal parliamentarian from N.S.W., was established by the new Minister for Social Security in April 1981 to review the policy and administration of the Children's Services Program. The Spender report and policy statements by the new Minister during 1981 and 1982 articulated an enthusiastic, rigorous, and unambiguous doctrine of selectivity that marked a significant shift in policy emphasis.

Firstly, this period was characterised by an increasingly restricted view of the role of the government in children's services. In the Senate in October 1981, the Minister for Social Security stated:

I think most Australians would accept that the primary obligation for the care of children rests with parents and that the role of government is to intervene and to assist in those cases where, for a variety of reasons, the parents themselves may not be able to meet their obligations (Senate, Debates, Vol.18, 1981: 1166).

The standard for judging the effectiveness of the Children's Services Program was presented by the Minister as the extent to which services were directed to "those people in the community who need it most", and Ministerial speeches

stressed the need to "refine and concentrate" Commonwealth funding in this way (Commonwealth Record, 1981: 1248). Secondly, the meaning of "need" was defined somewhat more rigorously than previously. The Spender report distinguished between children and families with special "social needs" who, it was felt, should receive priority of access to services, and children from poor families who, it felt, should not necessarily receive priority of access, but who should be given economic assistance in paying for services. The report also argued that the main focus of the children's services program should be "mainstream" services, which were defined as services for the day care of young children. This meant a reduced emphasis on programs for children with specific educational or therapeutic needs, which were viewed as the primary responsibility of other departments and other governments. These recommendations were accepted by the Minister, and were emphasised in official statements (Commonwealth Record, 1982: 7). In particular, there was a strong emphasis on directing funds to low income families to assist them with the costs of child care, and on ensuring that "parents able to pay the full cost of day care... do so" (Commonwealth Record, 1981: 1123).

The third feature of this period was an increased emphasis on effective strategies to implement selectivity, particularly to implement the objective of concentrating resources on low income families. The main strategy adopted was to tighten and alter the conditions attaching to funds made available to organisations providing children's services. Centres were strongly encouraged to monitor their enrolments to ensure that priority groups were in fact being served, and during 1982 and early 1983 new guidelines were introduced for income tests and fee scales in day care centres designed to direct public funds to low income families. These guidelines were widely criticised by a range of child care organisations during the last month of the Coalition Government, and they are under review by the new Labor Government.

In summary, all Governments responsible for the Children's Services Program between 1972 and 1983 have attempted to direct services to selected groups of families and children deemed to have needs or characteristics that should be recognised by special consideration. This objective has, however, been interpreted in very different ways. In disentangling the various meanings of "concentrating resources on those whose needs are greatest" it is important to distinguish amongst the various alternative bases for social allocation. These distinctions have frequently been unclear in public debate and public policy during the last decade. As well as blurring the

policy options available to governments, and the choices to be made by them, the rhetoric of "greatest needs" has sometimes confounded attempts to develop effective implementation strategies to direct resources to defined target groups.

Strategies to Implement Selectivity in the Children's Services Program

Attempts to implement selectivity in the Children's Services Program by either the Coalition or Labor Governments, have been affected by a variety of factors additional to the complex, and sometimes confused, interpretations that the notion of selectivity has carried. Firstly, the poor state of the economy and reduced government expenditure has resulted in a situation of strong competition for a limited pool of funds: the claims of "special need" groups have had to vie with a range of other interests. Secondly, the nature of the services themselves (and the partial nature of public provision) makes them susceptible to "creaming" by relatively well-to-do users. Children's services are valued and useful to many families in all socio-economic groups; they are also non-compulsory. The opportunity for the better informed, more articulate, and more politically aware groups to appropriate, or attempt to appropriate, the lion's share of resources are high. Thirdly, the primary method of implementation of children's services policy - public subsidy of community initiated and operated services - is less amenable to centrally imposed policy direction than some other service delivery strategies. This was a matter of concern to the Labor Opposition when the Child Care Bill was first introduced. The Opposition spokesman argued that the Commonwealth should take the responsibility for establishing priorities of need rather than leaving such questions to the "chance enlightenment" of non-government groups (House of Representatives, Debates, Vol. 81, 1972: 3048-3049). In a similar vein, it has recently been argued that a policy of a "centrally planned program akin to that of the schools system" (Burns, 1981: 25) would provide greater opportunities for purposive selectivity. Fourthly, the whole notion of setting priorities amongst differing social groups is opposed by some on the grounds that it is socially divisive. These factors, together with the varying notions of selectivity being pursued, have all influenced the selectivity strategies adopted.

The strategies adopted by the various Commonwealth Governments between 1972 and 1983 to direct resources to selected target groups, despite or

because of these factors, can be grouped into four categories:

1. Selectivity by geography, whereby geographic areas of "high need" are identified to receive priority in resource allocation.
2. Selectivity by catalyst, whereby identified target groups are encouraged and assisted in various ways to make claims on resources.
3. Selectivity by program, whereby programs are devised and funded specifically and solely for intended target groups.
4. Selectivity by funding guidelines, whereby funded organisations are encouraged or required to serve particular groups.

Each of these approaches will now be described, and discussed in terms of such factors as their philosophical underpinnings, administrative implications, effectiveness, costs and appropriateness in relation to differing notions of selectivity.

Selectivity by Geography

Throughout the Children's Services Program there has been a continuing intention to direct resources to geographic areas judged to be of high need. No notion of positive discrimination towards selected areas was contained in the Child Care Act, 1972 or in any other legislation, other than a reference to children suffering "locational disadvantages" in the unimplemented Children's Commission Act, 1975. But policy statements by ministers and officials have stressed the importance of providing services in areas of low socio-economic status, and in areas deprived of services and facilities. The decision to provide unmatched capital grants for child care centres in the original 1972 legislation was based on the idea that this would be an effective method of ensuring that centres would be built in areas of greatest social need (House of Representatives, Debates, Vol. 81, 1972: 2290).

The means of implementing geographic selectivity was first discussed in the reports of the Pre-Schools Committee (1974) and the Social Welfare Commission (1974). The Pre-Schools Committee, as noted earlier, emphasised the importance of locality in giving rise to need for services (1974: 25-26), and stressed the need for capital assistance in the first instance "for the establishment of facilities in localities and circumstances where the need is greatest... to further aspirations of equality of educational and social

opportunity" (105). The main suggestion as to how this might be done was to utilise the socio-economic ratings of localities being devised by the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission as a basis for allocations (105). The Social Welfare Commission's report also emphasised the importance of geographic allocation of resources, and provided considerable detail on how this should be achieved. The Social Welfare Commission's child care policy was quite explicitly one of allocation of resources on a geographic basis. It envisaged funds being made available, via the States, to local government authorities, who would be responsible for planning of child care, and allocation of child care funds, in their jurisdiction (1974: 36). The policy proposed that, until universal and comprehensive coverage was achieved, funds be allocated to local areas on a differential basis, discriminating positively in favour of most need. Priorities would be determined according to a socio-economic rating, ranging from one to five. Localities with a "one" rating (areas most in need) would receive a sufficient level of funds to ensure additional services by 1980 for forty per cent of children under school age. Localities with a "five" rating (areas least in need) would receive funds for additional services for only ten per cent of children, with thirty-three, twenty-five, and fifteen per cent being the equivalent figures for areas with ratings "two", "three", and "four". It was argued that this would "enable more children in lower socio-economic groups to participate in early childhood services" (1974: 97). Variables relating to occupation, education, migration, mobility, employment, ethnicity, and housing were included in the development of the ratings, which were calculated by principal component analysis (for statistical details, see Australia, Social Welfare Commission, 1974: 103-109).

Allocation of funds on a block basis to local authorities according to socio-economic need, as envisaged by the Social Welfare Commission, was never put into effect. Doubts were raised about the practicality of using local authorities as planning and funding bodies (Australia. Priorities Review Staff, 1974: 6-9), and the predominant pattern continued to be direct Commonwealth funding of community organisations providing services. However, from 1974 the policy was accepted that the socio-economic rating of the location of a proposed service should be one of the factors given consideration in assessing funding applications (Australian Government Digest 1974: 1249 and 1252). To this end, the Social Welfare Commission in 1975 published statistical data and socio-economic ratings relating to the needs of young children for services for all local government areas in Australia (Australia,

Social Welfare Commission, 1975). These data, together with other and more recent data on social indicators and other means of identifying areas of high needs have been used by the Office of Child Care in determining priorities amongst projects requesting funding (Guilfoyle, 1977: 4).

The effectiveness of these policies in directing resources to areas of socio-economic need has been a matter for debate, and requires further analysis beyond that which is possible in this paper. The Victorian organisation, Community Child Care, has argued that Commonwealth funds in Victoria have been targetted effectively on areas of high socio-economic need. They cite figures released by the Victorian Office of Child Care in March 1982 showing that of 7,187 Commonwealth subsidised child care places in Victoria, 2,093 (28%) were in the Social Welfare Commission's category 1 areas, while only 576 places (9%) were in category 5 areas (Community Child Care, 1982: 15-16). Given that the total number of children under five years of age in the thirteen category 1 areas in Victoria was 39,232, and that the comparable number in the sixty category 5 areas was 62,418 (Social Welfare Commission, 1975: 22-42), this suggests high target effectiveness. Partly on these grounds, Community Child Care reject the notion that the "submission model" has led to the middle classes "taking over" publicly subsidised child care services (1982: 15-16). The data from New South Wales have given rise to very different conclusions. The skewed distribution of child care places (including both those provided on a profit and those provided on a non-profit basis) in the Sydney area in favour of high socio-economic areas is widely recognised (Freestone, 1977; Burns, 1981; Robertson and Fox, 1981; New South Wales, Family and Children's Services Agency, 1979). Burns has provided data suggesting that the distribution of non-commercial child care centres has changed little during the 1970s; despite the influx of government funding, low socio-economic areas are still poorly served. A major reason for this she suggests is that "the 'needy' are the people with the least ability to muster the time, energy and skills required to act as a 'community'" (Burns, 1981: 23-24). A similar point is made in a recent NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) report on the distribution of children's services in New South Wales. After reviewing extensive information on the availability of children's services throughout the State, the report argues that:

The geographic spread of such services bears no discernible relationship to the geographic spread of potential users, and that the injection of government funding, itself aimed at providing for those most in need, seems to have limited

relationship to areas of high need (Robertson and Cox, 1981: 1).

The report cites municipalities of high socio-economic status that have a high proportion of their day care places subsidised by government, and poor areas with very low proportions of subsidised places. The conclusion drawn is that "provision of subsidised centres appears to relate more to the capacity of people to write submissions, than any objective criteria of need" (Robertson and Cox, 1981: 6). The policy implication is that the method of service delivery itself is biased against equitable distribution of services on a geographic basis:

As long as the provisions of welfare and community services is left to the initiatives of the people who understand the system and can work it, then the resources will not be distributed so that those most in need receive the lion's share, even of a limited cake (Robertson and Cox, 1981: 9).

The data presented in the NCOSS study provide strong evidence that government funding of children's services has not made significant inroads into the skewed distribution of children's services in, particularly, the Sydney metropolitan area. Those Sydney municipalities rated 1 and 2 (high socio-economic need) by the Social Welfare Commission in 1975 were ranked 7, 9, 39, 45, 55, 61, 67, 73, 82, 92 and 109 amongst the 117 New South Wales local authority areas in terms of availability of day care places per child in 1980. By contrast, those ranked 4 and 5 (low need) were ranked 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 22, 35 and 51. The average number of children per place in the "high need" areas was 21.5; in the low need areas the figure was 7.2 (based on figures in Robertson and Fox, 1981: 15-16). Although some "high need" areas have a high proportion of child care places funded by government, this is also true of many "low need" areas (Robertson and Cox, 1981: 21-23). The limited availability of government funds, and their extensive use in areas of "low need", has resulted, in Sydney at least, in continued inequality of access to children's services on a geographic basis. (It must be noted that the funding increases of the mid 1970s did not persist for long enough to keep pace with population growth in needy areas).

The apparent difference between Melbourne and Sydney in the geographic distribution of government-funded children's services requires further analysis, using strictly comparable data. Information from other States and cities also

should be made available. The NCOSS study does indicate that government funds have significantly increased access to child care in rural areas of the State, with seventy-eight local authorities totally dependent on government funded child care places (Robertson and Cox 1981: 21-22). This issue of urban-rural distribution of services needs further exploration. Nevertheless, the available information does suggest that the experience of implementing selectivity on a geographic basis has been different in Melbourne and Sydney. In Sydney, one factor may have been that a high proportion of funds initially went to "socially acceptable" and familiar services, such as sessional pre-schools (Robertson and Cox, 1981: 3), which tended to be located in well-to-do areas. The policies pursued by State-level Commonwealth officials, or the presence of stronger networks of support and advisory services for low income groups in Victoria, are other possible factors. Changes in the social character of areas must also be taken into account.

Several additional points concerning strategies of geographic selectivity need to be briefly made. Firstly, as a means of targetting services on selected types of families and children, such as low income families, geographic selectivity is a rather blunt instrument. The presence of a service in a low socio-economic area by no means assures that low income families will use that service. Additional policies relating to priority of admission, income tests, information provision, and so forth will be necessary to ensure that low income families (or other defined groups) gain access to the services provided in low socio-economic areas. Secondly, geographic selectivity is dependent upon the quality of the data and methods used to rank localities according to "need". The difficulties of accomplishing this satisfactorily have been discussed extensively in the literature on social indicators. Thirdly, there will always be political limitations to geographic selectivity. For example, in Australia there are strong pressures for allocation to be made to the States on an approximately per capita basis. Finally, the locality in which people live may not be the locality where the service is required, e.g. it may be more convenient in some circumstances for child care to be located close to work rather than close to home. For these reasons, together with the evidence of the failure in some places of efforts to give priority to high need localities, policies to direct resources to particular social groups must rely on strategies additional to selectivity by geography.

Selectivity by Catalyst

Selectivity by catalyst refers to the process whereby identified target groups are encouraged and assisted in various ways to make claims on resources. In the context of the Children's Services Program, this refers to attempts to assist low income and other special need groups to make successful applications for funding of programs, and to design programs and services that meet their particular circumstances and needs. It is the argument of groups such as Community Child Care in Victoria that the "submission" model of service delivery, combined with such resources as enable a wide range of community groups to access public funds, will result in those most in need obtaining the services they most need (Community Child Care, 1982: 14-16). "Catalysts" might include State wide advisory bodies, local community workers, officials acting in a supportive and advisory capacity, or local authorities. Whatever the form, the notion is one of assisting defined, disadvantaged groups to obtain resources and services that, without intervention, would be taken by groups whose needs are deemed to be of lower priority.

This approach to selectivity was incorporated in the overall service delivery strategy outlined by the Social Welfare Commission in 1974. That strategy envisaged widespread local participation in planning children's services, stimulated by "child care catalysts" who would, in a variety of ways, assist "the community members themselves to initiate and accomplish improvement in services for their children" (Australia. Social Welfare Commission, 1974: 44). Although the catalysts were seen as serving the whole community, not only disadvantaged groups, it was stressed that:

the catalyst would need to make a special effort to seek out members of the community who may otherwise remain unaware of possible service provisions, particularly those not able to articulate needs and express views without encouragement and assistance (45).

It was also expected that priority would be given to employment of catalysts in areas of high need. A number of catalysts were employed in Victoria and some other States during 1975 and 1976, and in later years somewhat similar functions were performed by Children's Services Development Officers, and field staff employed by local government or community groups, and funded by the Commonwealth. As resources for new services declined in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the defined role of these workers shifted away from identifying

needs and towards supporting existing services within the limits of existing resources, and thus their potential significance in the resource allocation process declined. The Commonwealth has also funded Ethnic Child Care Workers to, amongst other tasks, encourage access to child care services by migrant families. Groups such as Community Child Care have been funded to provide advisory and resource services to a wide range of community groups. Project officers employed directly by the Office of Child Care have also played a role in encouraging and assisting disadvantaged groups to apply for funding and establish services.

The overall effectiveness of these various strategies in directing resources to particular social groups is unclear, although it appears from information provided earlier in this paper that the various resource and advisory services in Victoria have had an impact on the geographic distribution of services. Evaluations of programs designed to stimulate community involvement have tended to stress the importance of community development and participation as such, and not to focus on the issue of which sections of the community are and are not participating in service planning and delivery. An exception is the evaluation report of the child care catalyst program in Victoria (Swinburne College of Technology, 1978). This report, based on a detailed study of the work of twelve "catalysts" in Victoria during 1975-1976, argued that such programs should be assessed in terms of which groups mainly benefitted, rather than in terms of overall community involvement. It concluded that, as an exercise in developing children's services amongst the most disadvantaged groups in the community, the program was not particularly successful (197). For various reasons, the catalysts tended to work with those groups most easily reached, in particular, women at home, English speaking residents and people already confident and active in groups and organisations. Thus the formulation of playgroups and neighbourhood houses tended to be the major outcomes of the work of the catalysts, and no significant impact was made on the child care problems of working mothers or migrant families (190-191). The report recommended that if these latter groups were to benefit from the employment of catalysts, the catalysts should be employed by trade unions or migrant organisations rather than by municipalities (191-194). The report suggests that disadvantaged groups can be assisted to obtain resources by methods such as the catalyst program, provided target groups are clearly specified and appropriate strategies are developed. Generalised efforts to stimulate community participation may, however, inadvertently exclude some disadvantaged groups.

Selectivity by Program

A third approach to selectivity in the Children's Services Program has been to fund services devised specifically for particular groups, accessible only to those groups. The rationale for this approach is that priority access to general child care services, while an important component of a selectivist strategy, may not in itself meet the needs of certain groups. Their particular circumstances may require specially designed programs. Groups that have been viewed in this way include handicapped children, migrant children, Aboriginal children, children living in geographically isolated areas, and children from families in stressed situations.

The origins of this approach can be traced to the Social Welfare Commission's 1974 report which recommended that "additional provision be made for those young children, and their families, who are less likely than others to gain access to an early childhood service because of physical or mental handicap, ethnic background or geographic isolation" (1974: 98). The rationale for additional, special provision for each identified group was spelt out in detail in the report (53-61). The overall emphasis was on facilitating integration of special groups into existing services, accompanied by separate provision as required for educational, developmental, cultural, or geographic reasons. This became government policy in late-1974 (Australian Government Digest, 1974: 1251). Under the Coalition Government between 1976 and 1980, the development of services for special need groups became a major emphasis of the Children's Services Program, and diversity of service provision was stressed as a policy objective. For example, by 1981, 69 services out of a total of 1,522 services funded under the Children's Services Program (excluding pre-schools funded through block grants to the States) were specifically designed for disabled children. These included services such as playgroups, vacation programs, recreation therapy programs, training and counselling programs, and programs to improve access to services. Migrant and Aboriginal groups were provided with grants to establish their own child care centres, and to develop specialised resource materials. Special projects were also funded for isolated families, for child care in women's refuges, and for projects concerned with preventing child abuse. By 1980-81, the percentages of total funds from the Children's Services Program (excluding block grants to pre-schools) spent on projects for specific groups were: disabled children - 2.7%; migrant children - 1.4%; Aboriginal children 2.6%; and family support services - 10.9% (Minister for Social Security, press release, 2nd September,

1980). This latter category included the Family Support Services Scheme, a project to provide funds to the States for passing on to community groups to provide a range of supportive services to families with special needs. In addition, a Youth Services Scheme was included as part of the Children's Services Program in the late 1970s. By 1980-1981, 23.4% of funds from the Children's Services Program (excluding block grants to pre-schools) was spent on projects designed to meet the special needs of particular groups (based on figures in Sweeney, 1982: 13).

This proliferation of special purpose projects has arguably gone well beyond the original and central purpose of the Children's Services Program, which is to provide a range of education and care services for families and children. It appears that the program has been used as a means of filling gaps and meeting needs stemming from the inadequacies of other related programs. The broad aims of the Children's Services Program have made it a convenient umbrella program, which has been used to accommodate a wide variety of projects that the Commonwealth, for one reason or another, has wished to fund. This tendency for the program's budget to be "eaten into" by projects that should be the responsibility of other Commonwealth or State Departments has been criticised by child care organisations and community groups (e.g. Community Child Care, 1982: 41). The Spender Report in 1981 recommended that there be renewed emphasis on day care services, including family day care and out-of-school hours care, and this was adopted as policy by the Minister. Services not falling into this category, but which are responses to the special needs of particular groups of children, will continue to be funded, but will not be the major focus of the program (Commonwealth Record, 1983: 254). This commitment to funding services for special need groups, within the broad parameters of the program, is a recognition of the value of "selectivity by program" as one means of directing services to particular target groups, especially in those circumstances where distinctive, tailored, services are required.

Selectivity by Funding Guidelines

The most controversial approach to directing resources to identified target groups has been "selectivity by funding guidelines" i.e. the process whereby funded organisations are required, encouraged or given incentives to serve particular groups. The terms and conditions under which children's services have been funded have included many matters, including providing

opportunities for community involvement, compliance with regulatory requirements of State and local authorities, operation on a non-profit basis, proper accounting and reporting procedures, and so forth. Our attention here is on those guidelines that directly affect, or are intended to affect, the social composition of the users of the funded service. Specifically, our concern is with requirements concerning eligibility and priority, requirements to monitor enrolments, funding formulae, and recommended fee scales and income tests.

Even since the introduction of the Child Care Act in 1972, funded programs have been required to agree to certain requirements concerning eligibility and priority of users. The basic eligibility requirement, unchanged since 1972, is that the service must be available to all children in the community. (This obviously applies only to general services, not to those specially designed for particular groups). There has been no attempt to restrict eligibility on grounds of income, geography, or any other need criterion. Restricting eligibility would, of course, be the most effective way of ensuring that services are "target effective", but there is no evidence that it has ever been seriously considered as a strategy to achieve selectivity in this program. Such a policy would be socially divisive and stigmatising to users, and would result in two systems of child care facilities: one publicly subsidised for the "needy"; the other private and paid for by users. All governments, despite their preoccupation with targetting resources on particular groups, have, thankfully, shunned the most effective means of doing this, presumably for the above reasons.

The principle of universal eligibility is, of course, the underlying cause of the need for strategies of selectivity, given that comprehensive provision has been deemed either impossible or undesirable. Since 1972, one of these strategies has been to require funded programs to agree to give priority in admission to certain types of families and children. Under section 20(4)(a) of the Child Care Act, centres are required to agree to give priority to children from lone parent families, recent immigrant families, and families in which at least one parent is sick or incapacitated (the Act also referred to low income families as judged by eligibility for certain health benefits, but this Section became inoperative in 1975). The Act also provided for priority to children whose circumstances are such that they are, in the opinion of the Minister, in special need of child care. Groups granted this latter status include children both of whose parents work; children from ethnic minorities,

including Aboriginals; children in isolated circumstances; children with a physical, intellectual or emotional handicap; children who are "at risk" of maltreatment; children from families in economic need; children whose family is likely to break down; and children who, in the opinion of the Minister, would especially benefit from services under the program. As a strategy of selectivity there are considerable problems with this list. Firstly, it includes a high proportion of those families who potentially do need child care. The only families that would not be given "priority" under these guidelines would be those that are two-parent, non-poor, stable and well-adjusted, Anglo-Saxon, not isolated, with healthy children, and with only one parent working. Such families do require various types of children's services. Conversely, some of the families included in the list of "special need" groups may not typically require mainstream day care services. To describe most potential users of a service, together with those that are disadvantaged in a general sense, as priority groups is useful for political purposes but of limited use in making clear decisions about resource allocation. Secondly, governments have not nominated priorities amongst the so-called priority groups, or issued guidelines to funded organisations to assist them to set clear priorities in admission. It is arguable that for governments to do so would be inappropriate; discretion in such matters should perhaps be exercised locally by service providers who are better situated to assess individual circumstances. However, little systematic information is available as to how agencies in fact set priorities in admission. In the absence of this information, and in view of the long list of unranked priority groups, statements that certain groups have priority in access must be treated with some scepticism.

Attempts have been made to monitor the extent to which special need groups do gain access to children's services. The Office of Child Care, in co-operation with State authorities, has in 1980, 1981, and 1982 conducted a national census of subsidised services to obtain this, and other, information. Difficulties experienced in collection and analysis of the data have resulted in delays in this information being made publicly available. On the basis of limited information made available in 1982, Sweeney and Jamrozik have estimated that the percentages of children attending subsidised services who belong to "special needs" groups are: children who have both parents in paid employment - 38.9%; children who receive a fee rebate for low income - 27.5%; children who have a lone parent - 22.4%; children who come from a family whose main language is not English - 5.4%; children who have a sick or

incapacitated parent - 3.3%; children who are handicapped - 2.0%; children who are Aboriginal - 1.0%; children who are isolated - 0.3% (1982: 108-109). This information, which should be treated cautiously in view of questions about the reliability of the data, does indicate which groups are the main beneficiaries of services. However, it does not tell us what priority is given to particular groups by services. In fact, there are no data available which relate distributive outcomes to levels of demand by the various groups. In addition, the distribution of services to various groups is affected by a range of factors additional to the "priority" given to groups. These include fee levels, availability of information about services, geographic location, suitability of services to particular groups, and whether funding arrangements give incentives or assistance to service providers to give priority to certain groups. Guidelines that require service providers to give "priority" to a wide range of special need groups are then, for the various reasons listed, of limited usefulness in targetting resources.

In addition to these exhortations to grant priority to certain groups, funding arrangements have given service providers assistance and incentives to facilitate access by certain groups. In the financial arrangements made under the Child Care Act between 1972 and 1982, the bulk of funds received by services took the form of recurrent grants in respect of staff. The effect of these funds was to reduce the fees paid by all users, and there was no intention to advantage any particular social groups. In addition, however, services received grants with respect to children in special need. For every child in a centre who was from a one parent family, a recently arrived migrant family, or from a family where one of the parents was sick or incapacitated, the centre would receive an additional subsidy at a fixed rate per child per hour. The intention of this subsidy was to enable centres to offer reduced fees to children of low income and other special need categories. Centres were not required to apply the subsidy to the fees of those children whose attendances provided the entitlement to that subsidy by the centre. Indeed, they were encouraged to sue the funds primarily to help those in economic need. In effect, services were given an incentive to admit children from the three categories of "special need", in order to build up a pool of funds with which to subsidise the fees of economically needy families. In practice, some services used their special needs subsidies only for those families who attracted the grant, others used it to reduce fees for low income earners, and others opted for a combination of both. The anomalies of this system are clear. Centres were being given assistance in offering reduced fees on

criteria not necessarily related to the capacity of families to pay. Centres also were given an incentive to accept children from the three defined special need categories in preference to other groups, without any clear rationale for this set of priorities being provided. The system resulted in inequities between centres (e.g. those with a high proportion of children from low income, two parent families were relatively disadvantaged), and between families (e.g. a high income, lone parent family could be enjoying reduced fees while a low income two parent family might not be). These inequities were partially reduced by the introduction of a special subsidy for low income families in April 1982. However, before this system had fully taken effect, the whole method of providing special need subsidies was revised.

The funding arrangements described above were not applied to all child care organisations receiving funds under the Children's Services Program. The main other arrangements were the family day care funding arrangements, and the "Centre Based Day Care Services Formula", used to fund small, multi-functional centre-based houses. Both of these arrangements provided special needs grants based on family means or income. To this extent, they avoided the central anomaly of special needs funding under the Child Care Act. However, schemes and centres funded under these arrangements were free to set their own criteria of eligibility for special need supplement, subject to an upper limit on the total special needs grant any one service could receive. This resulted in variation between services in fee scales, methods of assessing income, and administration of income and means tests. Concern over these variations, together with concerns about the anomalies of the Child Care Act funding arrangements, and linked with a desire by the Commonwealth Government in the early 1980s to assert the principle of "user pays", led to the introduction of new funding arrangements for day care services from August 1982.

Public statements during 1981-1983 by the Minister for Social Security, referring to the need for revised funding arrangements for children's services, emphasised three points. Firstly, a distinction was made between "the twin objectives of priority of access to services for people with special social needs and priority in assistance with the cost of childcare for people in economic need" (Commonwealth Record, 1982: 7). The former was to be achieved by way of centres giving priority of admission to those with special needs; the latter by introducing sliding fee scales based solely on capacity to pay. Secondly, the principle of the users of services meeting the costs of services, with subsidies for low income users, was enunciated. The Minister stated that,

"the Government expects that parents able to pay the full cost of day care should do so". (Commonwealth Record, 1981: 1123). Thirdly, there was a stress on the value of uniformity and standardisation, in relation to fee scales and income tests. "The object is to reach a position where all funded services in Australia can afford to operate an income test and fee scale system which will distribute fee rebates according to a reasonable sliding scale. Users throughout Australia should have reasonably uniform access to Commonwealth subsidies". (Commonwealth Record, 1983: 254).

The new funding arrangements for day care services issued by the Department of Social Security in August 1982 gave partial effect to the first and third of these emphases, and had little effect on the second. Under the new arrangements, recurrent financial assistance to centres takes three forms: Operational Support Subsidies, Special Economic Need Subsidies (SENS), and Supplementary Services Grants (SUPS). Operational Support Subsidies provide, as before, for a percentage of some salary costs of centres and schemes to be met by the Commonwealth. In dollar terms, these subsidies are the most important, and all users of services, irrespective of income, benefit from these subsidies in the form of reduced fees. To implement the principle of "user pays", it would have been necessary to eliminate or drastically reduce this form of payment. Presumably for primarily political reasons, this was not done. Supplementary services grants are a new form of assistance to assist centres and schemes to provide special service elements for children with particular developmental and cultural requirements. The detailed terms and conditions, and amounts available, are not yet known, but, in principle, they could be a valuable means of assisting services to provide facilities for groups such as disabled children. Little or no controversy has been raised concerning SUPS. However, the Special Economic Needs Subsidy, the main vehicle for the Commonwealth's objective of a more rational allocation of the fee subsidies low income families, has generated extensive debate.

In essence, Special Economic Need Subsidies provide funds to services to grant fee rebates to economically needy users. Services are required to devise income tests and fee scales, within certain guidelines provided by the Department of Social Security. Services will receive subsidies amounting to the total of fee rebates that they provide to their low income users. This system will enable centres and schemes to pass on the cost of serving low income users, who cannot afford the regular fees, to the Commonwealth Government. This will make it possible for centres to accept more low income

families on reduced fees, without raising the overall level of fees for users. Centres and schemes that currently have a high proportion of low income families and that use sliding fee scales, will be better off under the new arrangements as all of their low income families will now attract a subsidy. The new scheme was introduced on an experimental basis, with all funded programs being required to monitor the effects of their chosen income tests and fee scales on enrolment patterns and fee rebate expenditure during 1983. At the end of the experimental period the guidelines for the new funding arrangements will be reviewed, and, if possible, standardised income tests and fee rebate scales adopted.

Reaction to these guidelines has been varied. The economic advantages for services with a high proportion of low income users, the increased opportunity to provide services to low income families, and the move towards standardisation of income testing and fee setting, have been welcomed by many service providers. The reaction of the new Labor Government has been cautious. The new Minister for Social Security has announced a review of the system, but has stressed that "an income related subsidy for needy families is consistent with the Government's policy and it is a matter of determining whether this income testing arrangement is the best approach" (Minister for Social Security, News Release, 29 March 1983). Criticism of the guidelines has come from organisations representing service providers and users, and can be classified into two types. Firstly, there are criticisms that the new guidelines are incompatible with the decentralised, flexible structure of the Children's Services Program. Secondly, there are criticisms that stem from the inherent problems and difficulties in applying income tests in an equitable and efficient fashion. Each of these will be briefly discussed.

The predominant mode of service delivery in the Children's Services Program - public funding of non-government service providers - is based on the notion that a relatively high level of autonomy for the organisations providing direct services will result in services that are highly responsive to users' needs. This notion has had to compete with the conflicting principle of public accountability, and with the argument that in some aspects of service provision there is a necessity for centralised decision-making about needs and priorities. The new funding arrangements provide a clear example of this clash between the principles of centralised and decentralised decision-making. There can be no doubt that the new arrangements, and SENS in particular, involve an extension of public control over non-governmental service providers.

The list of terms and conditions of funding has been lengthened; additional financial information is required of services; the method of setting the level of maximum fees will now be subject to control; there are increased requirements for monitoring of patterns of usage; and there are clearly strong pressures betwads standardisation of fees, fee rebates, and income tests. Centres and schemes will have less flexibility in these areas, and will be more closely monitored and controlled. Implied in many of the criticisms of the scheme is the concern over this erosion of flexibility and decentralised decision making. Certainly, the new funding arrangements and guidelines do challenge the previous assumption that determinations about economic need and fee structures can be left primarily to the discretion of service providing organisations.

Most criticism has, however, focussed on the details of the guidelines for the new arrangements, which raise familiar issues of equity and efficiency that inevitably are associated with a system of income testing. Discussion has focussed around seven issues. Firstly, there has been debate over the "fee rebate cut-off point" i.e. the upper level of income at which families will not be eligible for any fee subsidy. The level indicated "for demonstration only" in the funding guidelines is \$250 assessed weekly family income. Assessed weekly family income is defined as total gross family income per week, less actual housing costs up to a ceiling (e.g. \$100 per week), less an allowance for each dependent child (e.g. \$20 per week). Some have argued that this "suggested" level is too high. Most have argued it is too low and that it will exclude many families who cannot afford the full cost of child care (Community Child Care, 1982: 5-8). Secondly, the issue of the minimum fee to be paid by very low income families has been debated. Guidelines issued in January 1983 set the minimum fee at \$10 per child; this was dropped as a requirement by the new Labor Government in late March. Thirdly, the method of arriving at the assessed family income has been widely discussed, with some groups arguing that the recommended ceilings for housing costs and costs of dependent children are too low, and/or that the method of calculating these deductions is inappropriate. Fourthly, concern has been expressed that families subject to this income test are also subject to a range of other income tests for housing, education, health care, and other benefits.

The cumulative effect of these various income tests appears not to have been considered by policy makers. Fifthly, there has been concern that implementing income tests will "work against the sensitive, non-stigmatised,

flexible atmosphere that centres have worked so hard to create" (Community Child Care Newsletter, May 1982: 1). Sixthly, opposition has been expressed to the administrative burden and complexity of implementing the new arrangements, particularly during the period of experimentation and interim arrangements. At least in the short-term, the additional work for paid staff and unpaid management committees, and for the Office of Child Care as it attempts to monitor the whole process, is considerable. Finally, it was made clear by the former Liberal Government that its financial commitment to SENS was not open ended. A letter circulated to services by the Minister on 23rd February 1983 stressed that the aims of the new arrangements were subject to "a budgetary requirement to ensure that the cost of the revised arrangements falls within funds allocated for the purpose". It would be ironical if SENS were to initially prove highly effective in achieving the goal of facilitating access to child care for low income families, but that this very success resulted in severe limitations on the level of subsidies provided, and hence renewed hardship or limited access for those in economic need.

Conclusions

The issues of who should receive services, and how to implement decisions to focus on certain groups, are raised in all social policies. In the Children's Services Program they have been to the forefront, because successive governments have considered it undesirable or infeasible to meet more than a fraction of expressed needs. The complexities, both philosophical and administrative, involved in pursuing policies of selectivity have tended to be camouflaged by the rhetoric of "directing resources to those with greatest needs". The issues have been fuddled by failure to clearly distinguish amongst different bases for social allocations, and insufficient attention to the strengths and limitations of alternative means of implementing selectivity.

It has been argued by some that "the debate about priority of access is a socially divisive one, ... a red herring drawing attention away from the real issues which are that there simply aren't enough services to go around" (Community Child Care, 1982: 4). In part, this is correct: most Australian families do not need support services of various kinds relating to the care and education of children, and the needs of the disadvantaged have been used as a smokescreen to direct attention from overall service inadequacies. However, questions about priority of access are also "real issues". In part this is because prevailing economic policies mean that large increases in funds for

children's services are highly unlikely, irrespective of which political party is in power. But it is also because the issues are unavoidable, irrespective of the degree of resource constraint at any particular time.

In practice all welfare provisions and all ways of financing them - from the most 'universal' to the most 'selective' - have selective and discriminatory effects. The questions are really of kind and degree: not whether to discriminate but how, and with what effect on whose fortunes and equalities. The options are many, with many graduations. (Stretton, 1980: 24).

This is particularly so in a field such as children's services involving families with a wide variety of circumstances and needs, and a wide range of different service types. A commitment to universal provision in this field requires particularly clear analysis of the bases on which allocations should be made, the ways in which services should be financed, and the alternative strategies available to distribute services.

II RESOURCE ALLOCATION AT THE PERIPHERY :
 THE ROLE OF DIRECT SERVICE ORGANISATIONS
 IN DISTRIBUTING EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Introduction

Central to the concerns of most writers on social policy are issues related to the allocation of resources. Donnison, for example, defines social policies as 'those policies that deal with the distribution of resources, opportunities and life chances between different groups and categories of people' (1976 : supplement). Studies of the resource allocation process, and of issues in resource allocation, often focus on central government policies and institutions. However, the policies of organisations located at the point of service delivery also have an important effect on the way in which resources are allocated to various social groups. The social policies of these 'peripheral' organisations, which may include voluntary agencies, community managed organisations, local agencies of central departments, or private sector organisations, are the concern of this paper. Many such organisations receive public funding to provide social services of various kinds, and an understanding of how they allocate these services amongst the individuals and groups that make claims on them is necessary in building a picture of the overall resource allocation process. The paper will suggest that, while service providing organisations may sometimes be considered to be on the outer rim of the decision making process, their role in allocating important social utilities is far from marginal.

The paper is based on a study undertaken in the first half of 1982 of the resource allocation policies and practices of forty-nine early childhood service agencies in Townsville, a provincial city with a population of 98,900, located in North Queensland. The field of early childhood services may be defined as 'all those formalised methods directed towards assisting the family in some or all aspects of child care' (Australia, Social Welfare Commission, 1974 : 7). The focus is on services for children in the years prior to school attendance, and on social utilities generally available to the whole population, rather than on case services designed for therapeutic purposes. The field includes day care and family day care services, operating on a part-day or a full-day basis throughout the year for nought to five year olds; and pre-schools and kindergartens, providing part-day educational programs during the school year for three to five year olds.

Other related services are playgroups, out-of-school-hours care, and occasional or emergency care services. In the Townsville urban area in 1982 there were fifty organisations providing early childhood services (excluding playgroups) comprising sixteen State Government pre-schools, seven kindergartens affiliated with the Creche and Kindergarten Association, eight non-profit child care centres (five of which were government subsidised), seventeen private sector child care centres, a family day care scheme, and one pre-school operated by a private school. Interviews were conducted with the directors of all services, excepting one director of a private sector child care centre who chose not to participate in the study. The data, therefore, reflect the perceptions and views of directors of services, and do not describe the perceptions and views of other staff or users of services.

Although the range of agencies listed above can usefully be considered as a field of services concerned with assisting families with the care and development of young children, administratively and operationally they do not comprise a unified system. There are in fact four distinct sets of services which, in the Townsville area, operate largely independently of the other sets, with little horizontal integration or co-ordination. These four sets, or sub-systems, are :

1. The Private Sector Child Care Centres

This is numerically the largest group of services, and has been expanding steadily in the Townsville area since the late 1960s. The services do not receive public subsidy, and their main source of income is user fees. They are subject to the Children's Services (Day Care Centres) Regulations, administered by local government in conjunction with the Queensland Department of Children's Services, which specify minimum standards for buildings, equipment, health and safety, staffing, and numbers of children. There is little formal interaction within this group of services, other than a monthly meeting of all day care providers in the area, which was organised initially by the Department of Children's Services. There is wide variation in size, and hours of operation, amongst the private centres.

2. The State Government Pre-Schools

Since 1972, the Queensland Government has been developing a system of universally available, free, pre-school education for children in the

year prior to primary school attendance. Approximately 76% of eligible children were attending State pre-schools in 1982. Local pre-schools are normally located adjacent to State primary schools. Pre-schools are part of the State education system, and are conducted according to guidelines provided by the department. They are totally publicly funded. There is an elaborate system of advisory services, provided by the Pre-School Branch of the Education Department.

3. Community Kindergartens Affiliated with the Creche and Kindergarten Association (C & K)

The Creche and Kindergarten Association, now in its 76th year, is an umbrella organisation for community managed kindergartens located throughout the State. To become a fully affiliated kindergarten, local groups must meet a range of criteria concerning staffing, program, facilities and equipment, and management structure. Affiliation status is reviewed annually, and advisors from C & K maintain close contact with centres. Kindergartens are also subject to the Children's Services (Day Care Centres) Regulations. Funding is from user fees, plus subsidies, channelled through C & K, from the State Education Department and the Commonwealth Children's Services Program.

4. Non-Profit Child Care Centres and Schemes

This is the most diverse sub-set of services, in terms of auspices, funding, and type of service provided. It includes eight child care centres, some offering all-day and others part-day care, and one family day care scheme. Of the child care centres, five are church-based, two are operated under the auspices of local government, and one is operated by the university student union. Five centres, and the family day care scheme, receive subsidies under the Commonwealth Government's Children's Services Program, administered by the Department of Social Security. Income is also received from user fees. Centres are subject to the Children's Services (Day Care Centres) Regulations, and the family day care scheme must meet other regulatory requirements. Formal interaction amongst centres is restricted to the monthly meetings of day care providers mentioned above. The Commonwealth Government also funds, through its children's services program, a range of vacation care, family support, and youth projects in the area, but these were not included in this study. Limited support and advisory services for

this group of services is available through local field staff of the Commonwealth Department of Social Security, and the State Department of Children's Services.

This complex mosaic of early childhood services reflects, and is a consequence of, several general features of the Australian social welfare system. Firstly, it reflects the partial and residual nature of that system. Australian governments were slow to respond to demands for child care and early childhood education stemming from changes in the paid workforce and community expectations in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Private individuals and community groups were quicker to respond and this in part accounts for the major role of for-profit child care centres and community kindergartens in the Townsville area. Secondly, it reflects the division of responsibility for welfare provision, and specifically early childhood services, between Commonwealth and State Governments. Commonwealth funding of child care services and schemes, and Queensland Government provision of pre-schools, have developed simultaneously during the 1970s, with minimal consultation, co-operation, or integration. Thirdly, it reflects the centralised nature of policy making and development in Australian social welfare. There are no mechanisms or structures at the city or regional level to set priorities and develop services in accordance with local needs and circumstances, or to integrate and co-ordinate the services of various organisations and governments. Fourthly, it reflects the powerful position of certain professional groups and bureaucracies which have been able to develop specialised services that reflect their interests and skills but which, arguably, meet only partially the needs of families. The development of Queensland pre-schools as part of the education system, but separate from most other early childhood services, is an example of this last point.

The desirability of a locally planned and integrated system of early childhood services was stressed in various Australian Government reports in the early 1970s (Australia, Social Welfare Commission, 1974 : 96-98; Australia, Priorities Review Staff, 1974 : 6-9), and became Commonwealth Government policy in 1974. However, the political, administrative and professional barriers to local integration proved insurmountable. The only integrating or planning structures for early childhood services in Townsville are either limited to a particular sub-system (e.g. the Regional Pre-School Officer in the Regional Office of the State Department of Education), or limited in their power or capacity to engage in planning and co-ordination in this field (e.g. local government). The main determinants of service

are, therefore, local initiatives by community organisations or entrepreneurs, or centralised decisions made within relatively narrow frames of reference and with little consideration of the overall pattern of early childhood services in the city.

This pattern of diverse auspices, funding arrangements, and service types, which only in the loosest sense of the word could be described as a 'system' of early childhood services, is typical of this field of service provision throughout Queensland and (in different forms) other States. The potential for gaps, fragmentation, and discontinuities, and for confusion on the part of consumers, is high. In this context, the policies of service-providing organisations concerning distribution of services assume considerable significance. In a situation of minimal city-level planning, combined as we shall see with an overall shortfall of services, the policies of service providers concerning such matters as which types of services to make available, information dissemination, physical accessibility, eligibility criteria, priority ratings, fee setting and income testing, and opportunities for consumer involvement in decision making, become important factors in determining which families receive services, and which do not. We will now turn to a more detailed examination of the range of factors involved in agency resource allocation.

Factors Involved in Resource Allocation by Direct Service Organisations

The pool of potential recipients of early childhood services includes all families with young children. Many studies have shown that in many parts of Australia the volume of early childhood services available falls far short of the demand; this is particularly so for day care services (e.g. Robertson and Cox, 1981). In this situation, two sets of factors will determine which families do and which families do not obtain services. Firstly, the distribution of services will depend on the preferences and the consumer skills and capacities of potential users. In a field such as early childhood services, a considerable proportion of families will choose not to use formalised services, but to rely on their own resources, including family, friends and neighbours, for their child care needs. Of the remainder, those who are able to obtain superior information, who have ready access to transport, who can predict their requirements, who can make their requirements known, and, above all, who have the economic capacity to pay, will, all other things being equal, be the most likely to gain access to services. The

second set of factors is the policies of those involved in service provision, including both central government and direct service providers. When services are provided by the private sector, consumer preferences, skills and capacities are typically left to determine the distribution of services (although there may be attempts to influence preferences through advertising). But in public sector's provision or subsidy of services, attempts are often made to identify priority, target groups, and develop means of ensuring that these groups gain access to services. This has certainly been the case in, for example, the Commonwealth Government's Children's Services Program, which is the main national source of funds for early childhood services. Although one condition of funding under the program is that the funded service be available to all families and children, certain groups have been identified as having a 'special need' of services, and hence a right to be given priority consideration. Lists of such groups have included children of lone parents; children both of whose parents are in the workforce; children from ethnic minorities; children in isolated circumstances; children with a physical, intellectual or emotional handicap; children whose parents are in economic need; children who are 'at risk' of maltreatment; children whose families are thought likely to break down with the resultant admission of the child to residential care; and children whose parents have a physical, emotional or intellectual handicap which adversely affects the child's development (Guilfoyle, 1978 : 3). Many of these groups have limited skills or capacities as consumers of early childhood services. Demands from consumers, and allocative priorities determined by service providers, may thus often be in tension or conflict.

Disentangling the resource allocation policies of government funding and regulatory bodies, and of service providers, in a field such as early childhood services is a somewhat complex process. Examples of the range of matters to be taken into consideration are shown in Figure One. Firstly, several levels of decision making must be included in the analysis. In relation to early childhood services in Queensland, policies relating to resource allocation are pursued by the Australian Government, by two departments of the Queensland Government, to some extent by local government (although this is a weak level of decision making in this field in Queensland), and by direct service providers. Secondly, it is necessary to distinguish amongst explicit allocative policies, policies with allocative consequences, and 'non-decision making' with allocative consequences. These levels and types of decision are illustrated in Figure One (see over). For example, the

Figure 1 : Examples of the Range of Policies that Influence the Allocation of Early Childhood Services

Decision Makers	Types of Decisions		
	Explicit Allocative Policies	Policies With Allocative Effects	"Non-Decision Making" With Allocative Effects
Australian Government	To provide priority access to special need families	Funding on basis of submissions received by community groups	—
Queensland Education Department	To provide free, universally available pre-schools	Pre-schools available on sessional basis only	Availability of other early childhood services not considered in planning allocation of services
Queensland Children's Services Department	—	Prescription of day care standards	No policy concerning appropriate level of provision of day care
Local Government Or Regional Planning Group	Sponsoring of services to serve particular social/geographic groups	Implementation of day care regulations by local authorities	Absence of local or regional plans for early childhood services
Direct Service Organisations	Sliding fee scale	Accepting children only on basis of time on waiting list	No clear policy concerning whether some children should have priority

Australian Government, in the Children's Services Program, has identified 'special need' groups who are to receive priority access to all funded services : this is an example of an explicit allocative policy. It has also adopted, as a service delivery strategy, the funding of services in response to submissions from community groups : this policy may have the unintended consequence of allocating services to articulate, middle class groups, and if this is so it is a policy with an (unintended) allocative effect. The Queensland Education Department has an explicit policy of universally available pre-schools; but by providing these on a sessional (part-day) basis they may not be readily accessible to children of working parents (an unintended allocative effect). By not considering the availability of the range of other early childhood services in its planning, the Education Department has, by default, affected the allocation of resources. The Queensland Children's Services Department has no explicit allocative policies concerning early childhood services, but its policy of insisting on certain standards of care that involve considerable expense may affect the availability of services in certain areas. Its failure to address, or apparently even consider, the issue of the appropriate level of provision of day care in the State is an example of 'non-decision making' with allocative consequences. The overall allocation of early childhood services will result from these various levels and types of policies (decisions about the overall allocation of resources to early childhood services in the Commonwealth and State budgetary processes are obviously also important factors, but they are outside the scope of this paper).

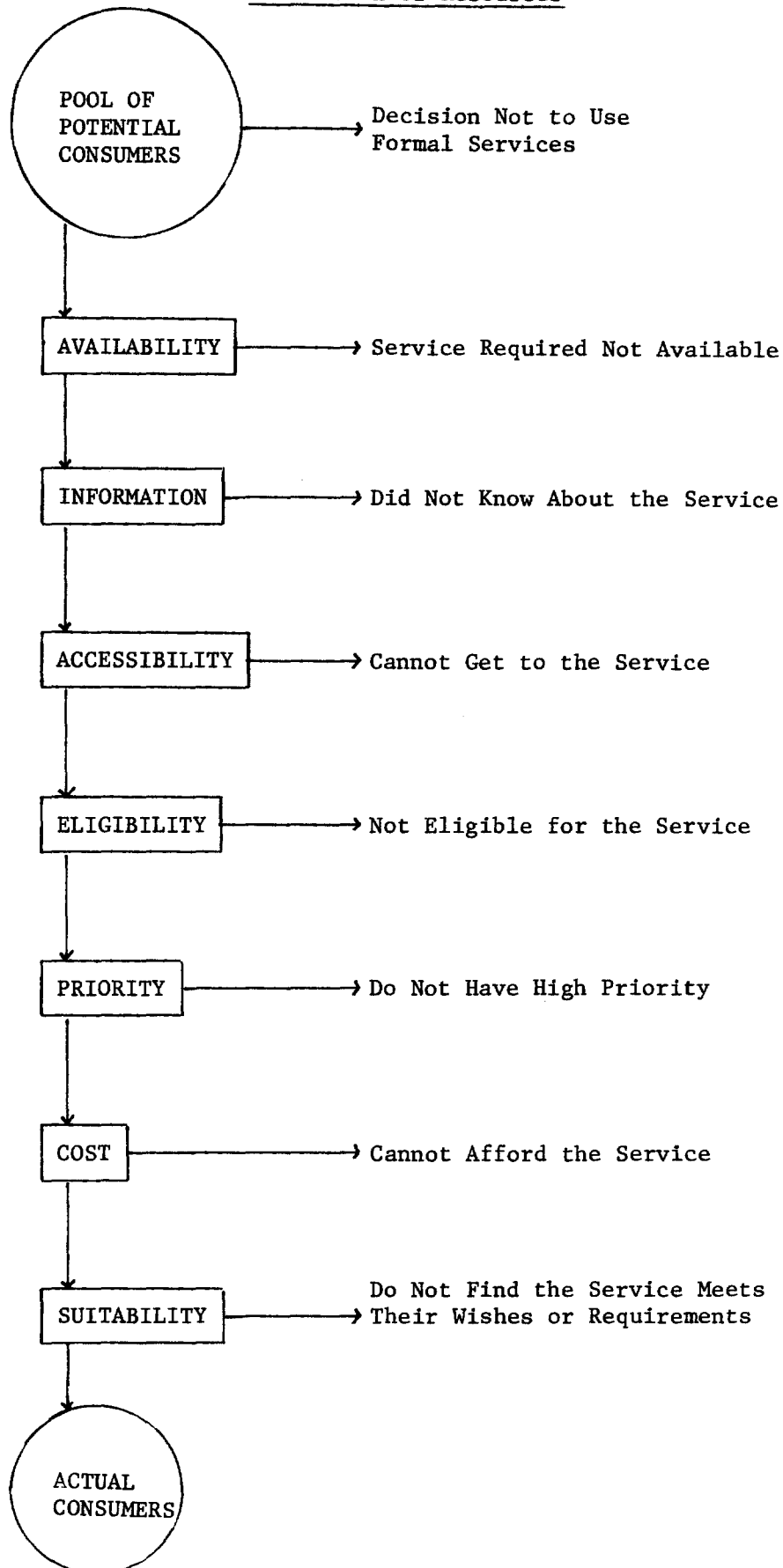
The focus in this paper is on the allocative policies of direct service organisations, that is, the bottom line of Figure 1. As indicated in the introduction, these organisation in our study fall into four main types : private sector child care centres; State Government pre-schools; community kindergartens affiliated with C & K; and non-profit child care centres. This last category can be further divided into government funded and non-government funded. The resource allocation policies of these various groups of organisations are not entirely open-ended. They are constrained in differing ways by the guidelines under which they operate, that is, by the policies of funding bodies, regulatory bodies, sponsors, or central office. Figure 2 shows the main constraints (these are as of early 1982; there have been changes to Commonwealth Government funding arrangements since that time). Some of these constraints on resource allocation policy are direct and explicit e.g. the requirement that Commonwealth funded child care centres give priority in admission to certain groups. Others are indirect e.g. the

Figure 2 : The Main External Constraints on Resource Allocation
Policies of Direct Service Organisations (May 1982)

<p style="text-align: center;">Relatively Autonomous ↑ ↓ Relatively Controlled</p>	Type of Organisation	Main External Constraints
	Private Sector Child Care Centres	No funding, sponsoring, or central decision-making bodies. Compliance with State regulatory requirements may affect level of fees charged. The need to cover costs and/or make profit influence decisions on location, fees, type of service provided, and information dissemination (advertising).
	Non-profit Child Care Centres - Not Funded	Compliance with regulatory requirements may affect levels of fees. Otherwise, no external constraints other than any objectives of the sponsoring body e.g. to serve particular types of families.
	Community Kindergartens Affiliated With C & K	Affiliation implies acceptance of standards of staffing, program, facilities, etc. which will affect level of fees. Kindergartens must comply with State regulatory requirements. They must also be community managed.
	Non-Profit Child Care Centres - Funded	Commonwealth funding imposes conditions of : operation on non-profit basis; sliding scale of fees for children from low income families; priority in admission to children "in special need"; user participation in service management; universal eligibility for all children in the community; compliance with State regulatory requirements.
	State Government Pre-Schools	Hours of operation, eligibility requirements (age of child), priority in admission (based on waiting list), and geographic location of service, are determined by the Department. Places may be reserved for "children with special educational needs" and children with handicaps.

Sources : Queensland. Department of Education, State Pre-School Teachers Handbook; Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland, Guidelines for Committees, 1979; Australia. Department of Social Security, Children's Services Program - Advice to Applicants (and sundry circulars to funded projects).

Figure 3 : Direct Service Organisations' Policies that Affect the Allocation of Resources



requirement of all centres, other than government pre-schools, to comply with State government regulatory requirements will influence the overall costs of the centre, and hence the fees charged. It should be noted that the level of autonomy of the different types of organisations to make resource allocation decisions varies considerably. Private sector child care centres have the most independence; State Government pre-schools are the most constrained : the others range in between in the order in which they appear in Figure 2. The extent to which autonomy, as opposed to central policy direction, is desirable in such questions is an issue for debate.

So far the paper has discussed the resource allocation policies of direct service providers in general terms, without detailing the main elements of such policies. This is done in Figure 3. The figure suggests that any early childhood service agency is faced with a pool of potential customers. Some of these, as discussed earlier, will decide not to use formal services. The remaining potential customers may or may not become users of the service. Agency resource allocation policies will be important determinants of the utilisation pattern. There are seven main components of such policies. Firstly, service providers may have discretion in deciding which kinds and what volume of services to make available : this is the most fundamental determinant of allocative outcome. Secondly, the extent and nature of information dissemination by the providing organisation will have some impact on which families request the service. Thirdly, geographical accessibility and 'psychological' accessibility (the extent to which the application procedures are complex, difficult, or intimidating) will affect allocation of services. Fourthly, eligibility criteria imposed by the service provider may disqualify some potential consumers. Fifthly, decisions to give priority in access to some types of children and families rather than others may enable some to 'jump the queue' (the queue itself is based on a notion of priority for certain groups). Sixthly, the cost to families of using the service will be a major obstacle for many : fee setting and income testing are key factors in the allocative process. Finally, the suitability of services to various potential consumers, including the extent of opportunities for consumers to influence the nature of services, will affect which kinds of families remain customers on a long term basis.

In summary, this section of the paper has suggested :

1. that one of the important levels of resource allocation is the direct service organisation;

2. that the level of autonomy of direct service organisation in resource allocation varies considerably;
3. that the major policy elements involved in resource allocation by direct service organisations are availability, information, accessibility, eligibility, priority, cost, and suitability.

The paper will now illustrate these points by an examination of selected aspects of the resource allocation policies of forty-nine early childhood services in Townsville.

The Resource Allocation Policies of Early Childhood Agencies

The resource allocation policies of the forty-nine early childhood services in the Townsville area will be described under the seven headings shown in Figure 3. The description will focus on policy differences amongst the different types of organisations, on the degree of autonomy in policy making available to the various organisations, and on the extent to which the allocative policies are explicit, indirect, or examples of 'non-decision making'.

Availability

The availability of services, that is, what kinds of services are provided in what quantities within a defined area, is the first factor that will determine allocative outcomes. Obviously, if no vacancies exist for a particular type of service then potential customers will be denied usage, irrespective of other factors such as cost, priority, accessibility, and so forth. The scarcer the service the greater the competition will be for available places, and hence the greater the need for effective policies to ensure that available services are rationed on an equitable basis. To obtain information about the availability of services, directors of organisations were asked for information about the types of services they provided, capacity, current usage, vacancies, waiting lists, and demand.

The types of early childhood services made available by the different types of providing organisations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Types of Early Childhood Services Made Available by
Different Groups of Providing Organisations

Services/ Organisations	Sessional Pre- School Education - 4 Yr Olds	Sessional Pre- School Education - 3 Yr Olds	Full- Day Child	Part- Day Child	Before /After School	Occasional Care	Emergency Care
State Pre-schools (16)	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Kindergartens (7)	7	7	0	0	0	0	0
Funded Care Centres & Schemes * (6)	0	0	6	6	3	6	6
Non-Funded, Non-Profit Child Care Centres (3)	0	0	0	3	0	0	2
Private Sector Child Care Centres (16)	0	0	8	13	7	7	8

* Includes the one Family Day Care scheme in the city.

The categorisation of services shown suggests clear cut distinctions; this is somewhat misleading as the differences amongst service types are to some extent blurred. For example, many of the child care centres provide planned education programs under the direction of a trained teacher and thus are providing pre-school education as an inherent part of the child care service; conversely, the State pre-schools and community kindergartens are in fact providing part-day child care. Despite these difficulties of classification, the overall pattern is clear. State pre-schools and community kindergartens are essentially unifunctional, providing sessional, educationally-oriented services for four year-olds and (community kindergartens only) three year-olds. They do not include in their service repertoire any child care oriented

services. Funded child care centres and schemes provide a wide range of child care services, from full-day care through to emergency care. Private sector centres similarly provide a range of care oriented services, although coverage is rather more patchy. The non-funded, non-profit centres are limited to part-day care and emergency care.

This pattern of availability of services mainly reflects decisions made by State and Commonwealth level authorities, rather than decisions of the local service providers. Pre-schools and community kindergartens provide services that are in many essential respects uniform throughout the State, and there is little or no scope for local initiative to provide other types of early childhood services. Similarly, Commonwealth-funded child care centres and schemes are required to provide full-day care, although they are also encouraged to be flexible in meeting families' needs for part-day, occasional, and emergency care. The private sector centres, which are the least constrained in decisions about which services to make available, show considerable diversity, some offering full-day and others part-day care as their basic service, supplemented in some cases with provision of outside-school-hours care for older children, and occasional and emergency care.

The impact of decision making about availability of services at Commonwealth and State levels, in terms of the quantities of the major types of services available, is shown in Table 2. Sessional pre-school education for four year-olds is widely available. 81.6% of the 1,470 places are provided free of charge in State pre-schools, the remaining places being in community kindergartens and one private pre-school at which fees are charged. A total of 100 vacancies were reported by directors of government pre-schools, suggesting that service provision has reached saturation point in some areas, despite waiting lists for some individual pre-schools. By contrast, availability of sessional pre-school education for three year-olds was restricted to 8.6% of the population, and all community kindergartens providing this service reported waiting lists and no vacancies. Full-day child care, including family day care, private sector centres, and government funded centres, was available for 9.0% of nought to four year-olds in the urban area. Most child care centres in the area do not keep waiting lists, but low vacancy rates and high numbers of inquiries suggest that demand for child care exceeds supply. Organisations providing child care services reported that overall they receive a total of some 574 inquiries per month from families thinking about using child care services, an average of twenty three per organisation. Occasional, emergency, and out-of-school-hours care

Table 2 : Availability of Major Types of Early Childhood Services in Relation to Potential Consumers

	Sessional Pre-School Education - 4 Yr Olds	Sessional Pre-School Education - 3 Yr Olds	Full-Day Child Care	Part-Day Child Care
Total Number Of Places - All Service Providers	1,470	150	760	421
Potential Consumers	1,715 (All 4 Yr Olds)	1,746 (All 3 Yr Olds)	8,402 (All 0-4 Yr Olds)	8,402 (All 0-4 Yr Olds)
Available Places As % Of Potential Consumers	85.7%	8.6%	9.0%	5.0%

Notes : Numbers of children in age brackets taken from 1981 Census for City of Townsville and Shire of Thuringowa combined. The numbers of full-day and part-day child care places available are to some degree interdependent, and the figures shown over-estimate somewhat the total child care spaces available.

are in short supply. Although these services are provided by a number of organisations (see Table 1), the availability of places is limited. At the time of interview, the total numbers of children using such services were : out-of-school hours care - seventy six; occasional care - ninety nine; emergency care - twenty one.

Three main conclusions relating to the resource allocation policies of early childhood service organisations can be drawn from this information. Firstly, the types and the quantity of services available in an area are largely determined by decisions made at the State and national level; there is limited scope for decision-making by local services. Secondly, even when there is some scope for local initiative, most services have tended to focus on "standard" services such as full-day and part-day care rather than on services such as out-of-school-hours care, and occasional and emergency care.

This may reflect the relative demand for various types of services, limited capacity to provide certain types of services, explicit priority setting, or, alternatively, failure to consider the range of possible options. Thirdly, limited availability is a characteristic of all early childhood services in the area, excepting sessional pre-schools for four year-olds. In such a situation, other resource allocation policies of direct service providers are likely to play an important role in determining who does and who does not gain access to these services that are available.

Information

Available services will not be utilised unless information about them reaches potential users. As users differ in their capacity to obtain information about services, and as information dissemination concerning early childhood services by central authorities is minimal, the information policies and practices of local service providers are likely to be significant factors in resource distribution. The directors of the early childhood services in the study were, then, asked a range of questions concerning the importance of information dissemination, their view as to who should be responsible for information provision, their understanding of how people in fact find out about early childhood services, and their organisation's policies and practices.

Table 3 shows that there is a spread of opinion amongst agency directors as to whether or not lack of information is a major barrier to service utilisation. Directors of funded child care centres were unanimous in identifying difficulty in finding out about services as a problem, while, at the other end of the spectrum, most directors of private sector centres did not share this concern. Similarly, there was diversity of opinion on the issue of responsibility for information dissemination (Table 4). Commercial providers were most inclined to see this as a responsibility of individual centres; State pre-schools were most inclined to see information provision as a responsibility of some other organisation. Those organisations identified as having this responsibility included the media (10), the Department of Children's Services (7), the Community Information Service (6), the Department of Education and/or the Creche and Kindergarten Association (5), local government (4), and other miscellaneous organisations (4).

Table 3 : "In general, do you think that families in Townsville have difficulty finding out about the children's services available to them?"

	State Pre- Schools	Community Kindergartens	Child Care Centres		
			Funded	Non- Funded Non- Profit	Private Sector
Yes	9	4	5	2	5
No	7	3	0	1	10
Don't Know	0	0	0	0	1
Total	16	7	5	3	16

Note : The one family day care scheme and one private pre-school have been omitted from this and most subsequent tables.

Table 4 : "Whose responsibility should it be to ensure that information about services is available? Should it be primarily the responsibility of individual centres, or primarily the responsibility of some other body or organisation?"

	State Pre- Schools	Community Kindergartens	Child Care Centres		
			Funded	Non- Funded Non- Profit	Private Sector
Individual Centres	2	2	0	0	8
Other Bodies	9	1	2	0	6
Both	4	4	3	3	2
Total	15	7	5	3	16

Directors were also asked to nominate, from a list provided, their view of the most common, and second most common, ways that parents of their service found out about the service. The list included the yellow pages of the telephone book, inquiry through formal organisations such as the Community Information Centre and various relevant government departments, referral from other agencies, informal discussion with friends and family, and seeing the centre while passing by. Directors from all types of services chose informal discussion as the most common method used (39/47 the most common; 5/47 the second most common), with "yellow pages" (4/47 and 13/47) and seeing the centre while passing by (2/47 and 17/47) also mentioned frequently. Inquiries through formal organisations were not viewed as major information channels by most directors. Agency directors were also asked about information dissemination practices, including advertising, use of brochures, and use of the Townsville Community Information Centre. Only twelve centres advertised in the local newspaper, including four private sector centres, three community kindergartens, and three government subsidised child care centres. Of these, only one centre, a government subsidised centre, advertised on a weekly basis, the other eleven advertising less than once per month. The thirty seven centres that did not advertise were asked if there was any particular reason why not. Eighteen, including ten private sector centres, said that it was not necessary as they had sufficient children, and twelve state pre-schools said that they were not permitted to advertise. Advertising on local radio stations is even less common, with only seven services occasionally (less than once per month) using this means of providing information. Similar reasons for not using this channel of communication were given as for not using newspaper advertising. More common is the use of brochures or pamphlets to describe services. Thirty three of the forty nine agencies have such a pamphlet, which is used mainly to provide information to enquirers. Only two services use the brochure to actively seek out prospective users (e.g. by distributing the brochure in letter boxes). Somewhat surprisingly, ten of the sixteen private sector centres do not have a brochure of any kind. Use of the Community Information Centre is extremely limited. Only eight services were certain that they were listed with the Centre, five thought they probably were, twenty eight were unsure or didn't know, and eight believed they definitely were not. Only four centres reported ever having families referred by the Community Information Centre.

The low key, laissez faire approach to information dissemination indicated by these responses reflects the high demand for services, the perception by many service providers that lack of information is not a

difficulty for consumers, reliance on informal communication channels, and the belief of some agencies that this is not a responsibility of service providers or that it is a shared responsibility with other bodies. The notion that some sections of the community may have more difficulty than others in obtaining accurate information to assist them in making decisions about usage of services, or that service providers should deliberately make information available to certain target groups to encourage or facilitate their use of services, seems almost totally absent. Given the considerable complexity of the early childhood services system, including the confusions of terminology (e.g. the term "kindergarten" is used by services that differ considerably in staffing, program, and facilities), the lack of clear, positive information policies by service providers is likely to affect the distribution of services. It leaves the onus with potential consumers, who vary in their capacity to obtain information about services and facilities.

Accessibility

The term "accessibility" is used here to refer to geographic accessibility — the ease or difficulty for potential consumers to travel to the service, and psychological accessibility — the extent to which the application process is complex, difficult, or intimidating. Geographic accessibility is dependent on the location of the service relative to potential users, and on the availability of transport. The location of the service relative to potential users is not an issue that can usually be addressed in current agency policy (the exception being Family Day Care which has the advantage of being highly flexible in terms of location). However, an awareness of the issue of geographic accessibility, and of the need to facilitate transport arrangements for potential users for whom the service is inaccessible, are important elements of strategies to allocate services in a deliberate fashion.

The forty nine early childhood services in the study are widely dispersed in twenty four suburbs within the Townsville urban area. State pre-schools are the most evenly spread throughout the city (sixteen services in fifteen suburbs), reflecting centralised decision-making concerning location of services and the policy of universal accessibility. Most bunched, although still spread throughout the city, are the private sector child care centres (sixteen in eleven suburbs). Despite this overall pattern of wide dispersal, most consumers are not within walking distance of services. Directors of services were asked to estimate what percentage of

current users would live within easy walking distance of the centre. The results are shown in Table 5. Although some pre-schools and commercial child care centres are apparently accessible by foot to a majority of current users, in most services most consumers must rely on other forms of transport. Public transport in Townsville is limited to an infrequent bus service. Twenty seven out of the forty eight directors of early childhood services stated that their centre was accessible by this means. In practice, however, this form of transport is shunned by users. All directors of services, but one, estimated that less than five per cent of users bring their children by

Table 5 : "In your estimation, what percentage of your families would live within easy walking distance of your centre?"

	State Pre- Schools	Community Kindergartens	Child Care Centres		
			Funded	Non- Funded Non- Profit	Private Sector
0- 20%	3	4	4	0	8
21- 40%	5	2	1	2	1
41- 60%	2	1	0	0	3
61- 80%	4	0	0	0	3
81-100%	2	0	0	1	1
Total	16	7	5	3	16

public transport, and thirty seven directors stated that no families at all use the bus service to transport children to and from the centre. According to the directors, private cars are by far the most important means of transport to centres, with sixteen directors estimating that over ninety per cent of users come and go by car, and a further twenty nine estimating that between seventy five and ninety per cent of families use private cars. Apart from walking and private cars, no other forms of transport are reportedly used to any significant extent by users of early childhood services in Townsville.

According to 1981 census figures 1.4% of private dwellings in the

Townsville area have no motor vehicle, and 43.5% of dwellings have only one motor vehicle. Clearly, families that are without a motor vehicle, and families whose vehicle is used during the day by a member of the household for employment purposes, will have difficulty gaining access to early childhood services. Ownership of private vehicles is widespread in our society, and for this reason geographic accessibility, particularly in a provincial city, may not be considered a major issue. However, for some families it will represent a serious barrier to utilisation of services, and therefore should be taken into consideration by service providers. One early childhood service in the Townsville area, which primarily serves the Aboriginal and Islander community, makes special transport arrangements for its users. Apart from this initiative, geographic barriers to utilisation are mainly left to consumers to solve for themselves.

The second aspect of accessibility considered here is the process of applying for services. If this process is lengthy, complex, difficult, or intimidating in any way, some potential users, particularly those not adept in dealing with organisations, may be deterred. Directors were asked to describe how applications were usually made, when applications were accepted, and what information was normally requested. No attempt was made to observe the application process, and therefore no information on the nature of the interaction between provider and applicant is available. However, some aspects of the process can be described. Firstly, initial contact with the service-providing organisation is reportedly direct in most cases, although some referral amongst services occurs. Contact by parents is most commonly made, according to directors, by telephone, although many parents make contact by visiting the centre. All services but one then require an application form to be completed. The length and complexity of this form varies considerably from service to service. Table 6 shows the information routinely requested of applicants by the service-providing organisations. Some questions that might be considered personal and confidential are required by most or many services (e.g. marital status, religion), but, overall, service providers are reticent in their information requirements (e.g. the very small number who require information about family income). Most services (forty three out of forty eight) operate on the basis of an annual intake at the beginning of the year, and accept bookings prior to the intake period. This procedure advantages those families whose circumstances make it possible for them to plan well ahead. Apart from this factor, and any aspects of the actual interaction between service providers and applicants, the application process itself does not appear to be a major barrier to

Table 6 : Number of services that routinely request certain types of information from applicants

	State Pre- Schools	Community Kinder- gartens	Child Care Centres		
			Funded	Non- Funded Non- Profit	Private Sector
Family Income	0	0	2	0	0
Place of Residence	16	7	5	3	13
Marital Status	11	4	4	2	9
Ethnic Group	3	5	2	0	1
Do Parents Both Work	15	6	4	3	13
Religion	1	5	2	3	9
Does Child Have Emotional/ Behavioural Problems	14	5	4	3	12
Is Child Handicapped	13	5	1	2	4
Length of Time in Australia	4	2	2	0	1
	16	7	5	3	16

applicants, or to work in any systematic way for or against any groups of applicants. It is a direct, quick, and relatively uncomplicated process. It is also, however, relatively indiscriminating amongst applicants.

Eligibility and Priority

The types of services made available, information dissemination (or the lack of it), and accessibility (both geographic and psychological) all have an impact on the distribution of resources. Clear and explicit agency policies on these matters are needed if the resource allocation process is

to be a deliberate and planned one. However, the policies most commonly associated with attempts to allocate resources in a positive way to certain target groups are those concerned with eligibility and priority (our concern in this section), and cost (examined in the next section of the paper).

Eligibility requirements define who is and who is not permitted to utilise services. Age requirements are laid down by all services included in the study, and are applied particularly firmly by State pre-schools who require proof of date of birth before children are admitted. Apart from age, eligibility requirements for all services are minimal. Place of residence, income, or special needs are not used as eligibility criteria by any service. One service requires eighty five per cent of children to be of Aboriginal or Islander descent. Otherwise, all services are open to all children of the appropriate age, unless there are specific health or behavioural reasons for denying a child entry.

Universal eligibility makes it necessary for service providers who wish to target their services onto particular groups to develop explicit policies to achieve this. One means of doing this is to give such groups priority in admission. Services funded under the Commonwealth Government's children's services program are required to give priority in admission to a range of groups, as listed earlier in this paper. State pre-schools, while basing admission on the length of time a family has been on the official waiting list, are permitted to give priority to children with special educational needs and to children with handicaps. The other early childhood services included in the study have no external guidelines or requirements to give priority to any types of children or families.

The directors of the early childhood services interviewed for the study were, overall, ambivalent about granting priority in admission to special need groups. Firstly, they were unanimous in viewing their role primarily as one of providing a utility to the community generally, rather than one of providing a therapeutic or a case service. They were asked : "Does your centre mainly aim to service families and children from all sections of the community, or mainly aim to serve families and children with special, pressing needs and problems?". All stressed the universal role, although two kindergartens indicated that they had specific target groups (one, Aboriginal families, the other R.A.A.F. families). Within this universal framework, however, agency directors indicated that providing services to special need children was, in principle at least, an important aim of their service.

This is shown in Table 7. Directors were given a list of various "special need" groups, and asked what their policy, as director of the centre, was towards each group. "In your view, is providing a service to these groups an extremely important aim, a somewhat important aim, an aim of minor importance, or not an aim?". All special need groups listed were viewed by most directors as important target groups for early childhood services. Despite these sentiments, mechanisms to ensure that such groups obtained services, by being given priority in admission, were, in general, poorly developed. Firstly, as shown in Table 6, information necessary to identify families as having special needs is, in many cases, not routinely obtained. For example, very few services routinely request information about family income, or length of family residence in Australia. Even when relevant information is obtained, this is usually for reasons other than allocation of places. Directors were asked the reason for requesting from applicants the information shown in Table 6. In almost all cases, the reasons for asking for such information as marital status, employment status of parents, behavioural problems of children, and place of residence, were to assist in service provision, rather than to make decisions about priority of admission.

One means of giving priority to special need groups is to reserve places in the centre or scheme for them, or at least to permit certain types of families to "jump the queue". This was done as a matter of policy by State pre-schools for handicapped children and children with special educational needs. Apart from this, reserving places for particular target groups was not widely practiced. One community kindergarten reserves places to take account of R.A.A.F. postings in January, and another reserves the majority of its places for Aboriginal children. Of the private sector centres, one has a policy of priority for lone fathers, one for isolated children, one for low income families, one for handicapped children, and one keeps two places open for emergency situations. Of the five government funded child care centres, three reported reserving places or granting priority as a matter of policy to low income families, two have such policies for handicapped children, three for children from lone parent families, one for children of invalid parents, and one for Aboriginal children. Centres, in general, make no attempts to monitor the kinds of families and children using the service. Only two government funded child care centres, and one private sector centre, indicated that they had compiled such statistics during the two years prior to the survey.

In summary, most early childhood services view themselves as universal

Table 7 : Policies of Directors of Early Childhood Services
Concerning Providing Services to Special Needs Groups

	Physically Handicapped Children	Intellectually Handicapped Children	Families With Inadequate Income	Aboriginal And Islander Children	Children Of Lone Parents	Children With Emotional/ Behavioural Problems	Families In Which Both Parents Work	Recent Immigrant Families
Extremely Important Aim	21	18	22	24	27	24	16	25
Somewhat Important Aim	10	14	8	14	12	17	17	17
Minor Aim	7	5	6	5	4	3	6	3
Not An Aim	11	11	13	6	6	5	10	4
Total	49	48	49	49	49	49	49	49

services to be used by families and children from all sections of the community. Eligibility requirements, other than age of children are minimal. The aim of providing services to children with special needs is espoused as a general principle, but the means to give such children priority in admission are generally not well developed.

Cost

The fee that consumers of services are required to pay obviously plays a central role in the resource allocation process. Even if families are well informed about available, accessible services for which they are eligible and have high priority, they will not be able to use them if they cannot afford them. The level of fees charged, the way in which fees are levied, and policies concerning reduced fees for low income consumers, are key determinants of distributive outcomes. State pre-schools are provided without charge to the consumer, and the cost barrier is thereby eliminated. However, all other early childhood services, both profit and non-profit, subsidised and non-subsidised, charge fees. The manner in which this is done varies considerably from service to service. Some charge by the hour, some by the day, some by the week, and some by the term or the year. Some charge more for the first hour than for subsequent hours; others charge a flat hourly rate. Some offer reduced fees if more than one child attends the centre. The age of the child being cared for, and the nature of the service provided are also taken into account in fee setting. Those services that provide care outside normal working hours sometimes charge at a higher rate for services at these times. Some services include meals as part of the fee; other do not. Some levy an absence fee if a child who is a regular user is unable to attend. Some offer a sliding scale of fees based on family income.

Keeping in mind these differences, an attempt was made to compare the fees charged by the various organisations providing early childhood services. The cost per hour for the major or most common service provided by each organisation was computed. The results are shown in Table 8. Perhaps surprisingly, because of their professional staffing and concern with high quality care, the least costly service to users are commonly kindergartens. In part, this reflects the extremely low user charges of the kindergarten that primarily serves Aboriginal and Islander families, but even excluding this centre the average fee for kindergartens is 65 cents per hour, still overall the cheapest early childhood services in town. Several factors account for this. Community kindergartens are subsidised for a high

Table 8 : Costs Per Hour of Early Childhood Services (May 1982)

	Community Kindergartens (7)	Child Care Centres		
		Funded (5)	Non-Funded Non-Profit (3)	Private Sector (15)
0-19 cents	1	-	-	-
20-39 cents	-	-	-	1
40-49 cents	2	-	-	2
50-59 cents	1	-	-	-
60-69 cents	1	2	1	4
70-79 cents	1	-	-	3
80-89 cents	-	-	-	2
90-99 cents	1	2	-	3
\$1 or over				
Average Cost	58 cents	92 cents	82 cents	72 cents

proportion of their staff costs; parents are extensively involved in fund raising, maintenance, and assisting in service provision; and the children served are three and four year-olds and staff-child ratios can therefore be higher than for the care of very young children. Similarly, a range of factors account for the relatively high fees of the funded child care centres. For the centre to receive subsidies, staff must hold certain qualifications and must accordingly be paid salaries at professional levels. Funded centres also offer services to children aged 0-5, and higher staff-child ratios are required for the younger children. Some funded centres have steep fee scales which mean that while the "normal" or maximum fee is high, those on below average incomes are paying substantially lower fees. The level of fees in private sector child care centres are highly variable, reflecting the different kinds of services provided, differences in quality, and differing profit margins.

The marked differences in charges from centre to centre can, therefore, be accounted for in various ways. Nevertheless, the relatively high costs

of some centres will represent a barrier to utilisation by lower income, potential consumers, unless adequate arrangements are made to relate charges to income. Such arrangements vary markedly from centre to centre. Only one community kindergarten, the service for Aboriginal and Islander families, provides lower charges for low income families. By contrast, all five government subsidised child care centres and the family day care scheme have a policy of charging at a lower rate for low income families (this is a condition of subsidy). Only one of the three non-subsidised, non-profit centres relates fees to income. Eight of the sixteen private sector centres provide reduced fees. Those services that do not charge at a lower rate for low income families were asked for their reasons. Seven of the sixteen centres concerned said they could not afford to do so, four said it was not necessary as most people could afford the charges, two said they had received no requests for reduced fees, and others stated that they did not consider it a desirable practice or that it was difficult to implement.

Those that did have a policy of relating fees to income were asked about how this was done. In all the government subsidised child care centres and schemes, and the one community kindergarten offering reduced fees, families applying to the centre are routinely given information about the possibility of lower charges for low income families. This was only true of two of the eight private sector centres offering reduced fees. In the remaining six centres the initiative in learning about the possibility of reduced fees is left with the consumer. Only in four of the government subsidised centres and in the family day care scheme is information about the possibility of reduced fees provided in written form. In only one centre is the level of income for reduced charges (sliding fee scale) specified in advance; in all other centres the decision as to whether a family is economically disadvantaged or not, and the appropriate fee to charge, is left to the discretion of the staff member in charge (note that in 1983 all Commonwealth subsidised centres and schemes have been required to introduce a sliding fee scale).

In summary, the fees charged by the early childhood services included in the study vary widely, with government subsidised child care centres, on average, the most costly to consumers. The cost of child care is a considerable barrier to utilisation by low income families, and policies to relate charges to income are necessary to minimise the impact of income on resource distribution. However, only sixteen out of thirty two child care services (State pre-schools are free of charge) provide reduced charges for low income

users. Of these sixteen, nine routinely inform applicants of the possibility of reduced fees, five of these provide this information in writing, and in only one centre is a sliding fee scale prepared and made available to consumers in advance. Overall, there is a need for more explicit policies to ensure that children are not denied utilisation of early childhood services because their parents cannot afford the fees.

Suitability

In addition to the factors already discussed, the distribution of children's services will be dependent on their suitability to the families and children using them. If families find that the service does not meet their wishes or requirements, and if they have the option, they will discontinue using the service. The suitability of services includes many factors including hours of operation, size, type of facilities, type of organisation, staffing, program, location, and so forth. Services vary widely in these respects, and consumer preferences are also highly variable. For these reasons, it would not be fruitful in this context, or indeed possible with the data available from the study, to discuss the match between user preferences and service provisions in the forty nine agencies studied. It is possible, however, to provide some information on the extent to which the various services are open to influence or direction by parent users (the assumption being that the greater the opportunity for parental direction, the greater the likelihood that the centre will meet their wishes and requirements). This information is provided below.

Parents are involved formally in decision making in all community kindergartens and funded child care centres as members of the management committee of the organisation. In State pre-schools, Pre-School Parents Groups exist to facilitate involvement of parents in the activities of the pre-school, but parents do not have control over or responsibility for the running of the service. In the other early childhood services, control rests with the sponsor or owner of the centre, although one commercial centre does have a management committee of parents. In addition to being asked about these formal decision making structures, service directors were asked if there were other ways that parents could influence the way the service was run. All services, except seven private sector centres and one funded centre, indicated that some such channels existed. Parents' meetings (27 services), informal discussions with the director (7), working in the centre (5), and suggestion boxes (1) were the specific means mentioned.

Overall, the opportunities for parents to ensure that services reflect their wishes and requirements vary widely, but in many centres seem limited indeed.

Conclusions

This paper has focussed on the resource allocation policies of direct service organisations in the field of early childhood services. It has attempted to clarify the ways in which the policies and practices of organisations such as child care centres and pre-schools can influence who does, and who does not, utilise valued and sought after social services. Although direct service organisations are constrained, to varying degrees, by Commonwealth, State, and Local Government policies, their practices and policies in relation to accessibility, priority setting, charging, and parental participation in decision making, are by no means marginal. Three general points are suggested by the review of the policies of the Townsville early childhood services. Firstly, it would appear to be desirable for service providing agencies to develop more explicit policies in relation to distribution of their services, and to be more aware of the impact of all their policies and practices on service utilisation patterns. All providers should be clear as to whom their intended consumers are, and should have strategies to ensure that these are the consumers served. Resource allocation should, where possible, be explicit and intentional, rather than being an area of "non-decision making". Secondly, the way in which a service is structured and organised has an impact on its resource allocation policy and practices. There were marked differences between the policies of the five service types included in the study. These factors should be taken into account in the debates over the most appropriate means of organising children's services. Thirdly, the inattention to various aspects of their resource allocation role of service providing organisations raises the issue of the need for greater external constraints, by funding or regulatory bodies, to achieve desired utilisation patterns. The moves towards compulsory sliding fee scales and standardised income testing for Commonwealth funded day care services since the latter half of 1982 suggest a trend towards greater control of resource allocation by service-providing organisations. These moves have been viewed with concern by those who value decentralised decision making. The most effective response by peripheral organisations, in a period in which demands for services are likely to far outstrip the capacity to provide, may be to develop explicit resource allocation policies and practices that are soundly based on an understanding of local needs and priorities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AUSTRALIA. Pre-Schools Committee. (1974) Care and Education of Young Children. Canberra: AGPS.
- AUSTRALIA. Priorities Review Staff. (1974) Early Childhood Services. Canberra: AGPS.
- AUSTRALIA. Social Welfare Commission. (1974) Project Care : Children, Parents and Community. Canberra: AGPS.
- AUSTRALIA. Social Welfare Commission. (1975) Needs Data by Regions. Canberra: AGPS.
- BURNS, A. (1981) "Child Care in Conflict : The Role of the Community". Australian Journal of Early Childhood, Vol.6, No.3, September, pp.22-27.
- COLEMAN, M. (1976) "The Role of Government - Accountant or Advocate". Speech to the Victorian Child Care Conference.
- COMMUNITY CHILD CARE. (1982) "Submission on Child Care to the National Women's Advisory Council". Fitzroy, Victoria: Community Child Care.
- COMMUNITY CHILD CARE. (1982a) "Discussion Paper on the New Funding Arrangements for Day Care Services to be Introduced by the Office of Child Care During 1983". Fitzroy, Victoria: Community Child Care.
- DONNISON, D.V. (1976) "An Approach to Social Policy". Australian Journal of Social Issues, Vol.11, No.1, supplement.
- FREESTONE, R. (1977) "Provision of Child Care Facilities in Sydney". Australian Geographer, Vol.13, May, pp.318-325.
- GEORGE, V. and WILDING, P. (1976) Ideology and Social Welfare. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- GILBERT, N. and SPECHT, H. (1974) Dimensions of Social Welfare Policy. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- GUILFOYLE, M. (1977) "Children's Services and the Commonwealth Government". Australian Journal of Early Childhood, Vol.2, No.1, March, pp.3-5.
- GUILFOYLE, M. (1978) "The Children's Services Program". Australian Journal of Early Childhood, Vol.3, No.3, September, pp.2-4.
- GUILFOYLE, M. (1979) "Social Welfare Policies for Children and Families : The Priorities of the Fraser Government". Speech to the International Council of Social Welfare Conference, August.
- HORNE, S., HARPER, R.J.A., and BUCHANAN, L. (1978) Means Testing and Social Welfare Policy. Sydney: Australian Council of Social Service.
- JAMROZIK, A. (1983) "Universality and Selectivity : Social Welfare in a Market Economy" in Graycar, A. (ed.) Retreat From the Welfare State. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, pp.171-188.
- JONES, K., BROWN, J., and BRADSHAW, J. (1978) Issues in Social Policy. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- NEW SOUTH WALES, Family and Children's Services Agency. (1978) N.S.W. Children's Services Study. Haymarket, N.S.W.: Family and Children's Services Agency.
- ROBERTSON, S. and COX, E. (1981) Scarce for Kids : Which N.S.W. Children Can Find the Services They Need? Sydney: Council of Social Service of New South Wales.
- SPEARTRITT, P. (1979) "Child Care and Kindergartens in Australia, 1980-1975", in Langford, P. and Sebastian, P., eds., Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia. Melbourne: Australia International Press and Publications.
- STRETTON, H. (1980) "Social Policy : Has the Welfare State All Been a Terrible Mistake?" in Evans, G. and Reeves, J. (eds.) Labor Essays 1980. Melbourne: Drummond, pp.19-39.
- SWEENEY, T. (1982) An Analysis of Federal Funding of Children's Services - A Sourcebook. (SWRC Reports and Proceedings, No.22). Sydney: Social Welfare Research Centre, University of New South Wales.
- SWEENEY, T. and JAMROZIK, A. (1982) Services for Young Children : Welfare Service or Social Parenthood? (SWRC Reports and Proceedings, No.19) Sydney: Social Welfare Research Centre, University of New South Wales.
- SWINBURNE COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY, Centre for Urban Studies (1978) Evaluation Report of the Child Care Catalyst Program in Victoria. Hawthorn, Victoria: Swinburne College of Technology.
- TITMUS, R.M. (1968) Commitment to Welfare. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- TOWNSEND, P. (1970) "Introduction : Does Selectivity Mean a Nation Divided?", in Social Services for All? London: Fabian Society, pp.1-6.
- WHITLAM, G. (1977) On Australia's Constitution. Melbourne: Widescape International Publishers.

SWRC Reports and Proceedings

- No. 1 J. Moller (ed), Data for Decision Making, September, 1980, 51 pp. \$4.
- No. 2 Peter Saunders (ed), The Poverty Line : Methodology and Measurement, October 1980, 54 pp. \$4.
- No. 3 Michael Morrissey and Andrew Jakubowicz, Migrants and Occupational Health : A Report, November 1980, 92 pp. \$3.
- No. 4 Jan Carter, States of Confusion : Australian Policies and the Elderly Confused, January 1981, 50 pp. \$3.
- No. 5 Adam Graycar and David Kinnear, The Aged and the State : A Working Paper, Revised edition, September 1982, 119 pp. \$4.
- No. 6 Michael Liffman, Immigrant Welfare : A Research Perspective, April 1981, 40 pp. \$3.
- No. 7 Bettina Cass, Unemployment and the Family : The Social Impact of the Restructuring of the Australian Labour Market, April 1981, 55 pp. \$3.
- No. 8 Adam Jamrozik and Marilyn Hoey, Workforce in Transition : Implications for Welfare, May 1981, 74 pp. \$4.
- No. 9 Robert V. Horn, Fiscal Welfare Effects of Changes in Australian Income Tax, 1972-73 to 1980-81, May 1981, 59 pp. \$3.
- No. 10 Concetta Benn, The Developmental Approach : Demonstration Programs in the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, May 1981, 20 pp. \$3.
- No. 11 Bettina Cass (ed), Unemployment : Causes, Consequences and Policy Implications, August 1981, 72 pp. \$3.
- No. 12 Adam Jamrozik and Robin Beck, Worker Co-operatives : An Evaluative Study of the New South Wales Worker Co-operative Programme, August 1981, 178 pp. \$5.
- No. 13 Robert V. Horn, Extra Costs of Disablement : Background for an Australian Study, September 1981, 25 pp. \$3.
- No. 14 P.R. Kaim-Caudle, Cross National Comparisons of Social Services Pensions for the Elderly, September 1981, 47 pp. \$3.
- No. 15 Adam Jamrozik, Marilyn Hoey, Marilyn Leeds, Employment Benefits : Private or Public Welfare?, November 1981, 138 pp. \$4.
- No. 16 Linda Rosenman, Widowhood and Social Welfare Policy in Australia, January 1982, 75 pp. \$3.
- No. 17 Adam Graycar and Wendy Silver, Funding of Non-Government Welfare : Agencies Serving Disabled People in Western Australia, January 1982, 89 pp. \$3.
- No. 18 Vivienne Milligan and Margaret McAllister, Housing and Local Government : An Evaluation of the Waverley Community Housing Officer Project, February 1982, 109 pp. \$3.
- No. 19 Tania Sweeney and Adam Jamrozik, Services for Young Children : Welfare Service or Social Parenthood?, March 1982, 144 pp. \$4.
- No. 20 Adam Graycar (ed), Age Care - Whose Responsibility?, March 1982, 49 pp. \$3.
- No. 21 Bettina Cass, Family Policies in Australia : Contest over the Social Wage, May 1982, 41 pp. \$3.
- No. 22 Tania Sweeney, An Analysis of Federal Funding of Children's Services - A Sourcebook, May 1982, 62 pp. \$3.
- No. 23 David Kinnear and Adam Graycar, Family Care of Elderly People : Australian Perspectives, May 1982, 63 pp. \$3.
- No. 24 Carol Keens and Bettina Cass, Fiscal Welfare : Some Aspects of Australian Tax Policy. Class and Gender Considerations, September 1982, 55 pp. \$3.
- No. 25 Jill Hardwick and Adam Graycar, Volunteers in Non-Government Welfare Organisations in Australia : A Working Paper, September 1982, 41 pp. \$3.
- No. 26 Robert Pinker, Theory, Ideology and Social Policy, October 1982, 23 pp. \$2.
- No. 27 Adam Jamrozik and Marilyn Hoey, Dynamic Labour Market or Work on the Wane? Trends in the Australian Labour Force 1966-1981, December 1982, 100 pp. \$4.
- No. 28 Adam Graycar, Government Officers' Expectations of Non-Government Welfare Organizations : A Discussion Paper, December 1982, 93 pp. \$3.
- No. 29 Jan Carter, Protection to Prevention : Child Welfare Policies, January 1983, 76 pp. \$3.
- No. 30 Peter Travers, Unemployment and Life-History : A Pilot Study, June 1983, 75 pp. \$4.
- No. 31 Jo Jarrah (ed), 53rd ANZAAS Congress : SWRC Papers, June 1983, 118 pp. \$4.
- No. 32 Andrew Jones, Selectivity in Children's Services Policy, June 1983, 68 pp. \$4.
- No. 33 Ian Scott and Adam Graycar, Aspects of Fiscal Federalism and Social Welfare, July 1983, 89 pp. \$4.