



Australian Government

Department of Education and Training

National Report

**National Partnership Agreement on
Universal Access to Early Childhood
Education – 2016 and 2017**



ISBN

xxx-x-xxx-xxxxx-x [PRINT]

xxx-x-xxx-xxxxx-x [PDF]

xxx-x-xxx-xxxxx-x [DOCX]



With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms, the Department's logo, any material protected by a trade mark and where otherwise noted all material presented in this document is provided under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/>) licence.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (accessible using the links provided) as is the full legal code for the [CC BY 3.0 AU licence](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/legalcode>).

The document must be attributed as the National Report: National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education – 2016 and 2017.

National Report

National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education – 2016 and 2017

Background

Purpose of this report

Through the *National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education – 2016 and 2017* (2016-2017 National Partnership), the Commonwealth made \$840 million available to support states' and territories' ongoing investment in the provision of quality early childhood education programs in 2016 and 2017. Under the agreement, there is a requirement for the Commonwealth to compile and publish a National Report summarising national and state and territory achievement against performance benchmarks.

This report presents performance as assessed by the Australian Government under arrangements set out in the 2016-2017 National Partnership.

Different terms are used to describe early childhood education programs across Australia. Some states use the term preschool, while others define it as kindergarten. For ease of reference, the term preschool is used throughout this report.

Aim of universal access

The objective of this initiative is to provide universal access to quality preschool programs for all children in the year before full-time school for 600 hours per year, delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher who meets National Quality Framework (NQF) requirements, with a focus on participation by Indigenous and vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Preschool programs are play-based and tailored to meet the learning needs of younger children. They are delivered in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework, which has been developed by experts and agreed by all Australian governments. Programs must be delivered in a way that meets the needs of children, parents and communities and ensures that cost is not a barrier to participation. Preschool programs may be delivered through dedicated preschools (such as those attached to government, Catholic or independent schools, or community preschools) or through long day care centres.

The 2016-2017 National Partnership and associated state and territory Implementation Plans (IPs) can be found at: <http://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education.aspx>

Preschool enrolment and participation information

The National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (the National Collection) is the mechanism for collecting data to assess performance under the 2016-2017 National Partnership. The National Collection takes a 'snapshot' of data across the country in a reference week/s in August each year and is published as the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Preschool Education, Australia publication.

The Early Childhood Education and Care National Minimum Data Set (ECEC NMDS) is a set of national data standards that was established by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in conjunction with the ABS, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, and state and territory departments responsible for early childhood education. All data in the National Collection meets the ECEC NMDS requirements (refer to Baseline data below for more information).

Together with the ABS Estimated Resident Population data, the National Collection enables the Department of Education and Training to assess state and territory performance against agreed performance indicators (PIs). Under the 2016-2017 National Partnership, states and territories are able to supplement the National Collection with additional information for consideration in the assessment of their performance. The outcome of this process results in a final assessed performance for each state and territory against PIs 2, 3 and 4, including sub cohorts.

The provision of supplementary data is voluntary and jurisdictions may choose to do this one year and not the next. This can impact on data comparability across years, and thus caution should be used when interpreting the results presented in this report.

In 2017, the ABS developed an improved data linking methodology that provides a more accurate statistical picture of preschool enrolments across Australia. This new methodology was applied in the 2017 National Collection, and therefore performance between 2016 and 2017 is not directly comparable.

Indigenous population estimates

In its population publications, the ABS highlights volatility in Indigenous person and population counts, and the quality of data on births, deaths and migration of Indigenous persons. As a result, alternative measures to the ABS' standard approach to population estimation (observed numbers of births, deaths and migration during a specified period, added to the population at the start of the period) are applied for estimating Indigenous population estimates. Therefore, Indigenous person and population estimates presented in the National Collection should be interpreted with a degree of caution.

Further details on Indigenous population estimates can be found on the ABS website.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children

There is currently no nationally agreed definition of 'vulnerable and disadvantaged' children under the 2016-2017 National Partnership. The PIs use Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, which is a nationally consistent measure of disadvantage available from the National Collection. States and territories may use different measures in their individual IPs as agreed bilaterally with the Commonwealth.

Performance measurement

The outcomes, PIs and benchmarks under the 2016-2017 National Partnership are provided in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Outcomes, Outputs, Performance Indicators and Performance Benchmarks

Outcomes	Performance Indicators (PIs)	Performance Benchmarks/Targets
Providing universal access to and improving participation of all children in affordable, quality early childhood education program(s), including that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. vulnerable and disadvantaged children have access to, and participate in, an affordable, quality early childhood education program; ii. Indigenous children have access to, and participate in, an affordable, quality early childhood education program; and iii. all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education. 	<u>1. Teacher Qualifications</u> The proportion of early childhood education programs delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher who meets the NQF requirements.	95 per cent.*
	<u>2. Access to Quality Program</u> The proportion of children enrolled in the year before full-time school in quality early childhood education program(s).	2.1 95 per cent of children; 2.2 95 per cent of Indigenous children; and 2.3 95 per cent of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
	<u>3. Access to a Quality 600 hour Program</u> The proportion of enrolled children, enrolled in the year before full-time school in quality early childhood education program(s) for 600 hours per year.	3.1 95 per cent of enrolled children; 3.2 95 per cent of Indigenous children; and 3.3 95 per cent of vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
	<u>4. Attendance</u> The proportion of enrolled children who attend, in the year before full-time school, quality early childhood education program(s) for 600 hours per year.	Annual targets agreed in Implementation Plans taking into account a jurisdiction’s starting point and moving to 90 per cent over time

* Since 1 January 2014, changes to the National Quality Framework (NQF) resulted in a requirement that all long day care and preschool services providing care must have access to an early childhood teacher (see www.acecqa.gov.au/higher-qualifications). Consequently, for the purpose of this Agreement PI 1 is taken as achieved.

While there are four PIs outlined in the National Partnership as shown above, only PIs 2 and 3 (and their sub-categories of all children, Indigenous children, and vulnerable and disadvantaged children) have payments linked to them.

The measurement of PI 4 is based on ‘of the children enrolled, the proportion of children that attended for at least one hour during the reference week’. Noting the limitations of this measure, and that preschool is not compulsory, progress against this indicator is reported but not tied to payments.

Progress since the first National Partnership

Significant progress has been made since the first National Partnership was agreed in 2008, with more Australian children attending preschool programs each year. In 2008, it is estimated that 206,000 or 77 per cent of children in the year before full-time school, were enrolled for an average of 11 hours a week. At the commencement of National Partnership arrangements, very few services offered programs that were available for 15 hours per week (or 600 hours per year), as highlighted by Chart 4 in the report.

Since 2014, all states and territories have consistently met the top benchmark of achieving 95 per cent or above for the proportion of children enrolled in a quality preschool program. While this is a noteworthy achievement, we know that enrolment figures overstate actual preschool enrolment rates in some jurisdictions due to the methodology used to calculate National Partnership performance¹.

Baseline data

Prior to National Partnership arrangements, there was limited preschool data available. The first National Partnership was instrumental in developing a nationally consistent preschool database for the first time. Therefore, 2008 data used for comparison in this report is not directly comparable between states and territories, nor with 2016 and 2017 results.

The National Collection commenced in 2010, with administrative data provided by each state and territory agency responsible for early childhood education. Due to significant under-coverage and inconsistent reference periods, not all data within the 2010 and 2011 National Collections achieved complete alignment with the standards set out in the ECEC NMDS, and thus the estimates within those two publications are labelled 'experimental'.

After significant work to improve data quality, by 2012 the National Collection met ECEC NMDS standards and was no longer labelled as experimental.

Preschool enrolment data for Indigenous children was not available in 2008. The reporting of achievement against PIs 2.2 and 3.2 in this report therefore compares performance to 2011 as the baseline, when more reliable data became available.

Similarly, baseline data to report enrolments of Indigenous children and vulnerable and disadvantaged children enrolled in a program of 600 hours per year (PI 3.2 and PI 3.3), were not available until 2013 and 2014 respectively.

¹ National Partnership enrolment figures are calculated using 'the number of children aged 4 and 5 years, as at 1 July of the collection year [enrolled in a preschool program]' divided by the 'estimated residential population (ERP) of children aged 4, as at 30 June of the collection year'.

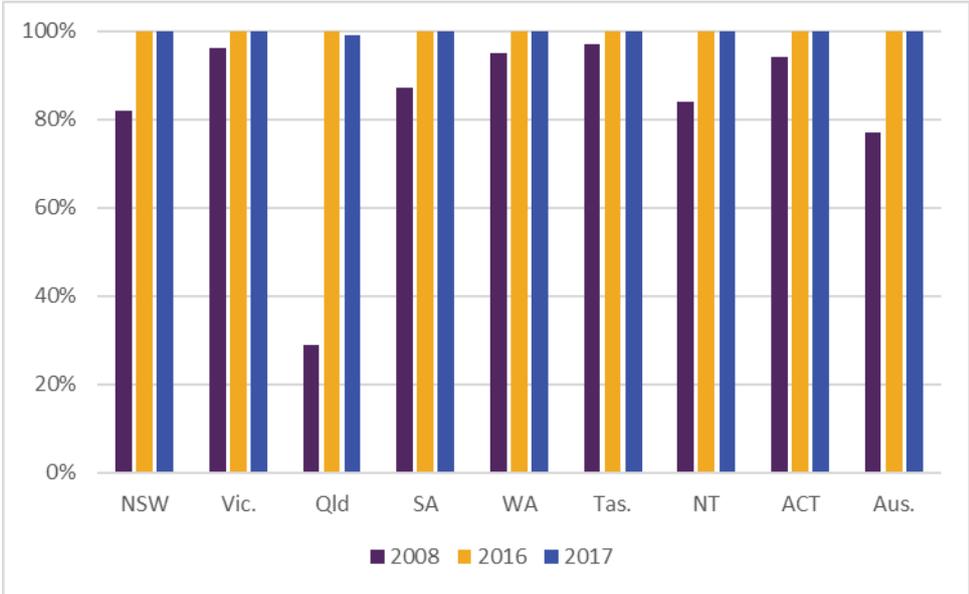
National Partnership Performance

Proportion of children enrolled in preschool (PI 2)

All children (PI 2.1)

In both 2016 and 2017, all jurisdictions exceeded the 95 per cent benchmark for children enrolled in a preschool program. Compared to 2008, all states and territories have achieved a significant improvement against this PI as shown in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Proportion of children enrolled in preschool—all children (PI 2.1)

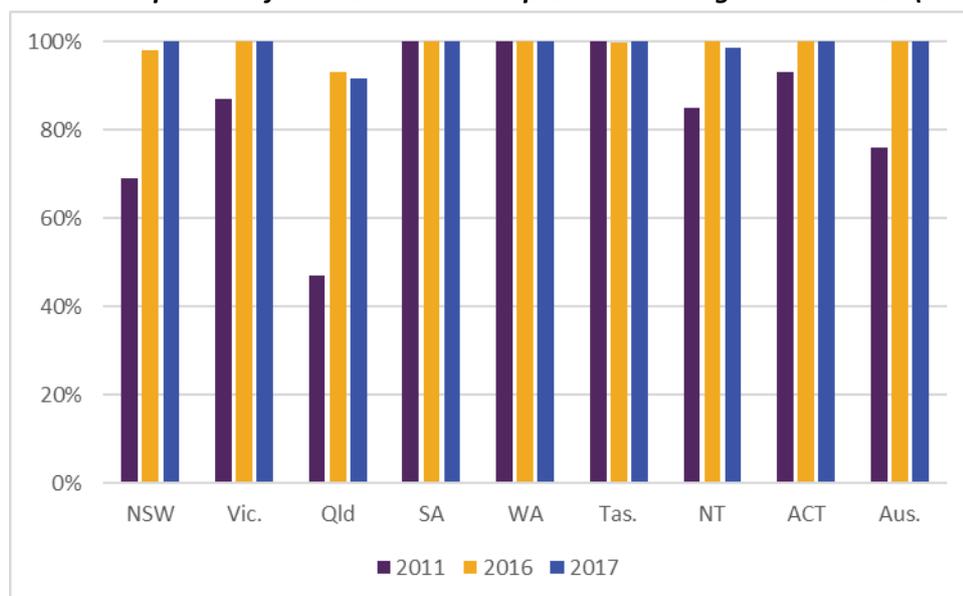


Source: 2008 data from Bilateral Agreements under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.
 Notes: Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2008, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions. Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent.

Indigenous children (PI 2.2)

In 2016 and 2017, seven states and territories met or exceeded the 95 per cent benchmark for the proportion of Indigenous children enrolled in a preschool program. All states and territories have significantly improved performance against this PI since 2011, noting that South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania have maintained achievement of 100 per cent since reporting began.

Chart 2: Proportion of children enrolled in preschool—Indigenous children (PI 2.2)



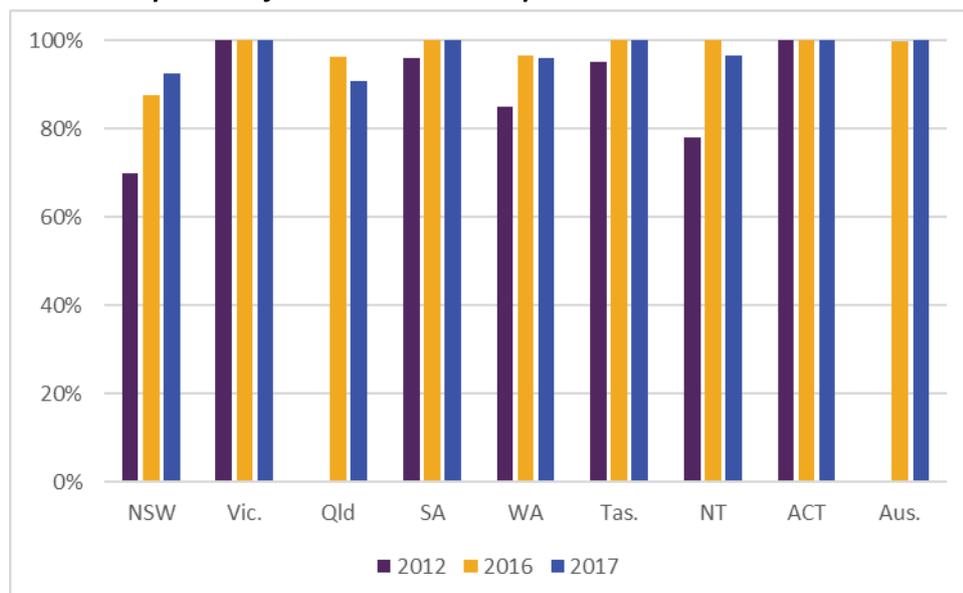
Source: 2011, 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0) and ABS Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026 (cat. no. 3238.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.
 Note: Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2011, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions. Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children (PI 2.3)

Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory all achieved enrolment rates of 100 per cent for vulnerable and disadvantaged children in both 2016 and 2017, with Western Australia and the Northern Territory also meeting the 95 per cent benchmark in this period.

New South Wales has shown a steady improvement in preschool enrolments of vulnerable and disadvantaged children since 2012. The apparent decline in performance of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory against this PI from 2016 to 2017 is most likely attributable to the changed data linkage methodology in 2017 as outlined in the Background information.

Chart 3: Proportion of children enrolled in preschool—vulnerable and disadvantaged children (PI 2.3)



Source: 2012, 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0) and ABS Australian Demographic Statistics (cat. no. 3101.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.
 Notes: Queensland 2012 data not available due to data quality; national data for 2012 not available due to this reason.
 Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2012, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions. Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent.

Proportion of children enrolled in preschool for 600 hours per year (PI 3)

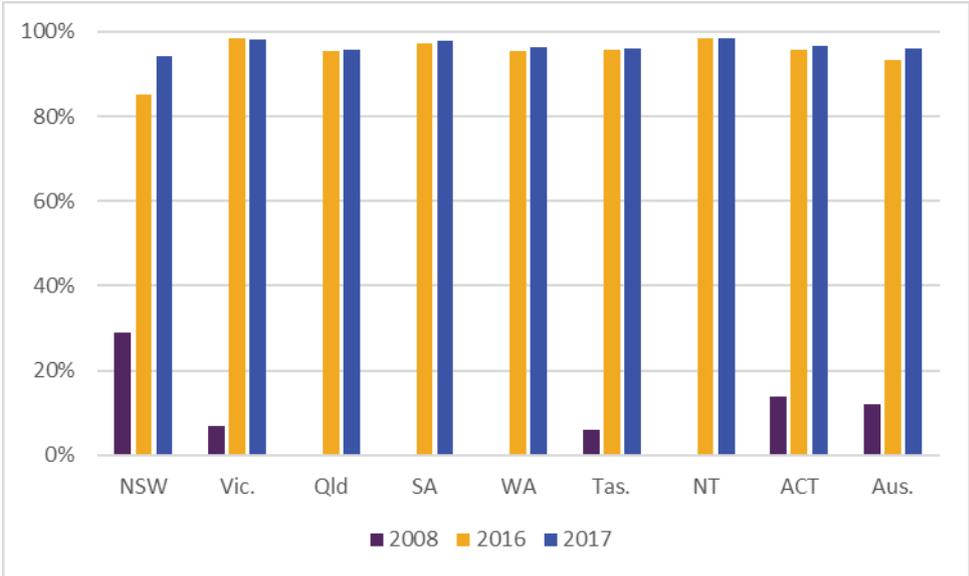
All children (PI 3.1)

In 2016 and 2017, the majority of jurisdictions met or exceeded the 95 per cent benchmark for the proportion of children enrolled in a preschool program for 600 hours. New South Wales demonstrated the greatest change over a year for this PI, increasing performance from 85 per cent in 2016 to 94 per cent in 2017.

All states and territories have shown a significant increase against this PI since 2008, where Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory reportedly did not offer any programs of 15 hours per week. Refer to Background for more information on baseline data.

It should also be noted that in 2013, the reference to ‘15 hours per week’ changed to to ‘600 hours per year’ to allow for more flexible forms of program delivery.

Chart 4: Proportion of enrolments in preschool programs of 600 hours per year—all children (PI 3.1)



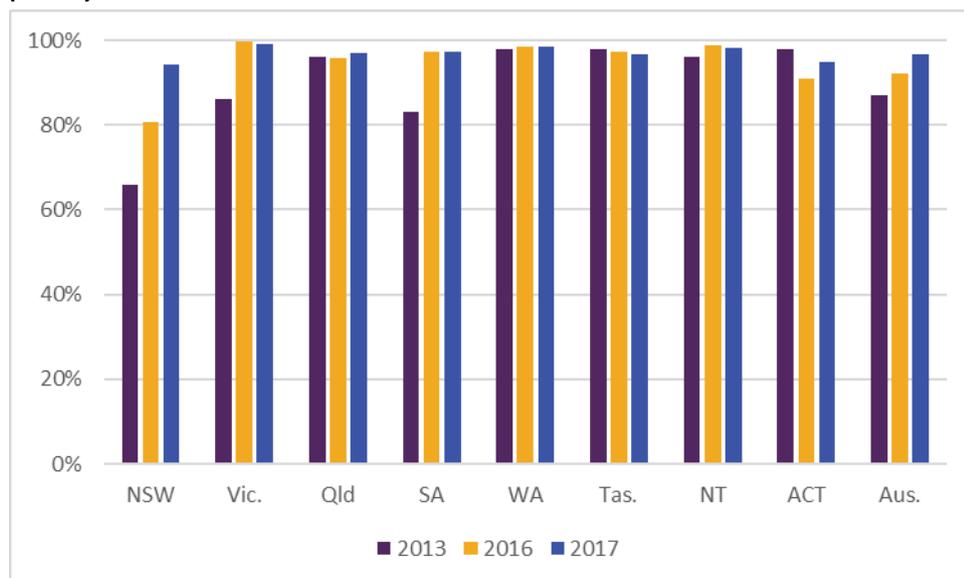
Source: 2008 data from Bilateral Agreements under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Note: Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2008, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions.

Indigenous children (PI 3.2)

There has been a steady increase nationally in the proportion of Indigenous children enrolled in a preschool program of 600 hours per year since 2013. Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory all achieved or exceeded the 95 per cent benchmark in both 2016 and 2017. The Australian Capital Territory met this benchmark in 2017, an increase from 91 per cent in 2016. The most significant change against this PI since the baseline was established was in New South Wales, which achieved an enrolment rate of 94 per cent in 2017—an increase from 81 per cent in 2016.

Chart 5: Proportion of enrolments in preschool programs of 600 hours per year—Indigenous children (PI 3.2)



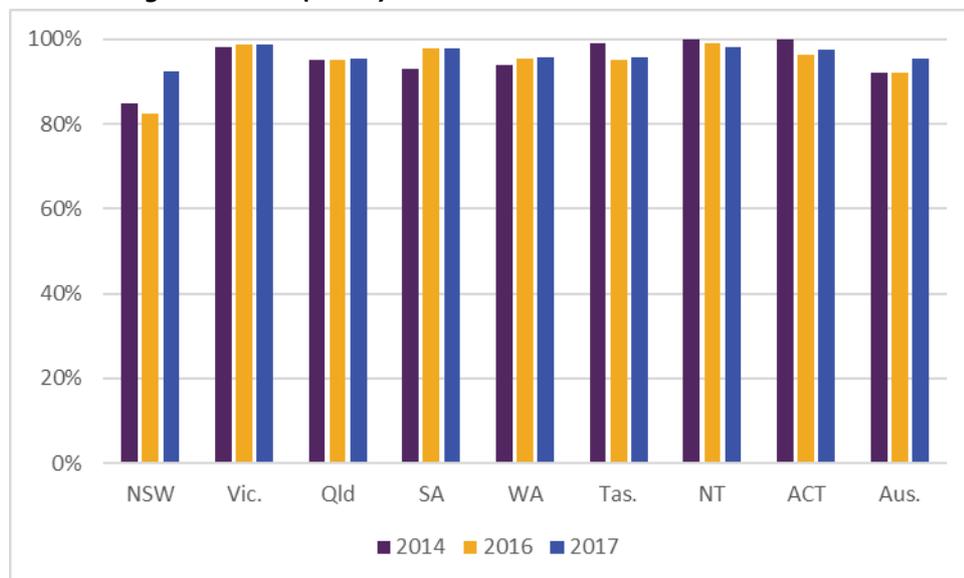
Source: 2013, 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Note: Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2013, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions.

Vulnerable and disadvantaged children (PI 3.3)

Seven states and territories met or exceeded the 95 per cent benchmark for enrolment of vulnerable and disadvantaged children in preschool programs of 600 hours per year in 2016 and 2017. New South Wales improved its performance by 10 percentage points from 2016 to 2017, increasing to 92 per cent in 2017. Nationally, an enrolment rate of 96 per cent was achieved in 2017.

Chart 6: Proportion of enrolments in preschool programs of 600 hours per year—vulnerable and disadvantaged children (PI 3.3)



Source: 2014, 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Note: Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used in 2014, 2016 and 2017, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions.

2016 and 2017 summary tables ²

Table 1: Performance indicator 2—children enrolled

	All children			Indigenous Children			Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Children		
	2008	2016	2017	2011	2016	2017	2012	2016	2017
NSW	82%	100%	100%	69%	98%	100%	70%	88%	92%
Vic.	96%	100%	100%	87%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Qld	29%	100%	99%	47%	93%	92%	n/a	96%	91%
SA	87%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%	100%	100%
WA	95%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	85%	97%	96%
Tas.	97%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%	100%	100%
NT	84%	100%	100%	85%	100%	99%	78%	100%	97%
ACT	94%	100%	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Aus.	77%	100%	100%	76%	100%	100%	n/a	100%	100%

Source: 2008 data from Bilateral Agreements under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. 2011, 2012, 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0) and ABS Australian Demographic Statistics (cat. no. 3101.0), ABS Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026 (cat. no. 3238.0) and ABS Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia (cat. no. 3235.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Note: Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent.

n/a—not available due to data quality.

Table 2: Performance indicator 3—children enrolled that are enrolled for 600 hours

	All children			Indigenous Children			Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Children		
	2008	2016	2017	2013	2016	2017	2014	2016	2017
NSW	29%	85%	94%	66%	81%	94%	85%	82%	92%
Vic.	7%	98%	98%	86%	100%	99%	98%	99%	99%
Qld	0	95%	96%	96%	96%	97%	95%	95%	95%
SA	0	97%	98%	83%	97%	97%	93%	98%	98%
WA	0	96%	96%	98%	99%	99%	94%	96%	96%
Tas.	6%	96%	96%	98%	97%	97%	99%	95%	96%
NT	0	99%	98%	96%	99%	98%	100%	99%	98%
ACT	14%	96%	97%	98%	91%	95%	100%	96%	97%
Aus.	12%	93%	96%	87%	92%	97%	92%	92%	96%

Source: 2008 data from Bilateral Agreements under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2017 data from ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Notes: A different calculation methodology was used in 2008 compared with 2016 and 2017.

Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent.

² For each indicator the baseline year has been selected based on the earliest year that reliable and comparable data is available—refer to 'Background' for more information. Due to the inclusion of supplementary data for some jurisdictions and different counting rules used, data is not directly comparable across years or across jurisdictions.

Table 3: Performance indicator 4—attendance

	All children			Indigenous Children			Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Children		
	2013	2016	2017	2013	2016	2017	2013	2016	2017
NSW	98%	96%	96%	96%	95%	96%	98%	96%	96%
Vic.	96%	95%	95%	92%	92%	93%	94%	93%	94%
Qld	98%	97%	96%	96%	95%	94%	98%	96%	96%
SA	99%	98%	98%	96%	95%	95%	99%	98%	98%
WA	100%	96%	96%	100%	90%	90%	100%	94%	93%
Tas.	98%	98%	98%	97%	98%	99%	98%	98%	98%
NT	88%	92%	88%	77%	82%	74%	76%	81%	72%
ACT	98%	98%	97%	99%	99%	94%	99%	99%	98%
Aus.	98%	96%	96%	94%	93%	93%	97%	95%	95%

Source: ABS Preschool Education, Australia (cat. no. 4240.0). Includes supplementary data from some jurisdictions.

Note: Where proportions are calculated using two different sources of data, data comparability issues can result in estimates greater than 100 per cent. Where this occurs, results are capped to 100 per cent. PI 4 is calculated based on attendance of at least 1 hour in the reference week.