2 Adoptions in Australia 1998–99

When an adoption order is granted, the legal relationship between the child and the biological parents is severed. The legal rights of the adopted child are as if he or she had been born to the adoptive parents, and the legal rights that exist from birth with regard to the birth parents (inheritance and name, for instance) are removed. A new birth certificate is issued to the child bearing the name(s) of his or her adoptive parent(s) as the natural parent(s), and the new name of the child, where a change has occurred.

Each State and Territory in Australia has responsibility for all aspects of adoption within its jurisdiction and has its own legislation regarding adoption (see Appendix 2).

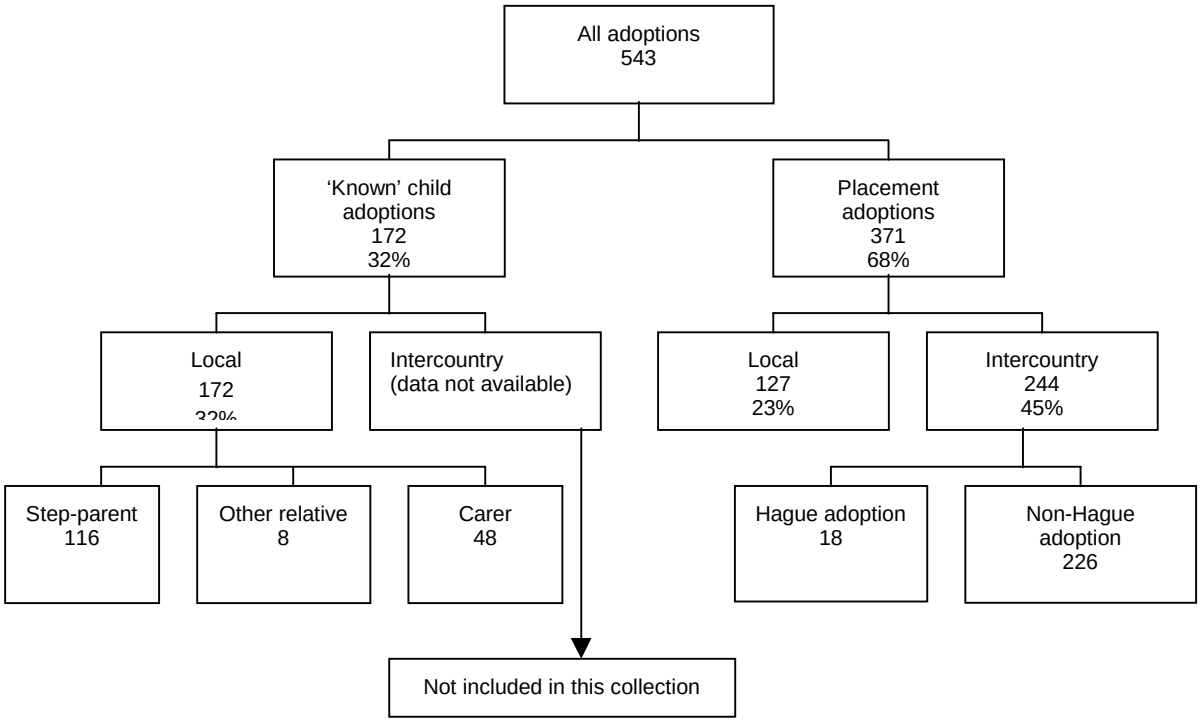
Access by the birth parents or other relatives to the adopted child (sometimes called 'open' adoption) is encouraged in most States and Territories. The degree to which this process is encouraged varies across the jurisdictions (see Appendix 3).

Overview of main findings

In 1998–99 there were 543 adoptions of children in Australia. This is a decrease of 34 (6%) from the 577 adoptions in 1997–98.

The main features regarding adoptions in 1998–99 are:

- 68% (371) were placement adoptions and 32% (172) 'known' child adoptions (Figure 2);
- 55% of adoptions were of local children ('known' child and placement) (299), and 45% were of children from outside Australia (244) (Figure 2);
- of the 172 'known' child adoptions, 67% were adoptions by step-parents, 28% by carers and 5% by other relatives (Figure 2);
- there were 127 placement adoptions of local children and 244 placement adoptions of children from outside Australia (Figure 2);
- whereas the majority (65%) of 'known' child adoptions were of children aged 5–14 years, most children placed for adoption were in the younger age group—under 5 years of age (85%) (Table 1); and
- there were 5,430 applications for access to information made by adopted persons, birth parents, other birth relatives and adoptive parents (Table 22).



Note: Percentages are of total adoptions.

Source: Tables 1, 8 and 15.

Figure 2: Adoptions in Australia, 1998–99

Table 1: Adoptions by age, type of adoption and sex, 1998–99

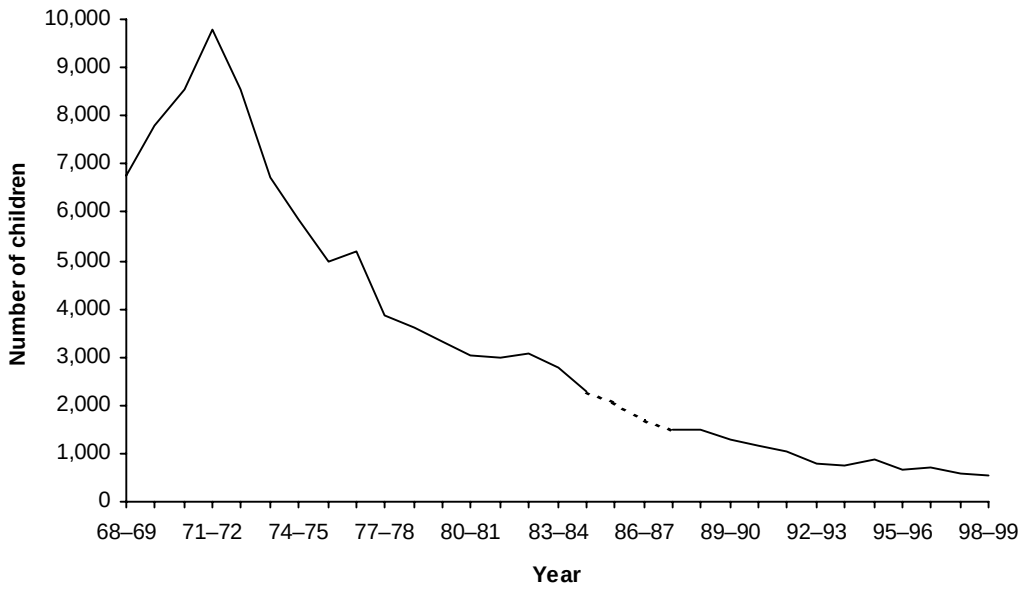
Age (years)	'Known' child adoptions				Local placement adoptions				Intercountry placement adoptions			Total			
	M	F	U	P	M	F	U	P	M	F	P	M	F	U	P
								Number							
Under 1	—	—	—	—	27	33	—	60	29	24	53	56	57	—	113
1–4	15	9	—	24	21	31	—	52	71	71	142	107	111	—	218
5–9	34	24	—	58	3	1	—	4	16	23	39	53	48	—	101
10–14	21	28	—	49	—	—	—	—	7	3	10	28	31	—	59
15+	14	17	3	34	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	14	17	3	34
Unknown	2	1	4	7	—	—	11	11	—	—	—	2	1	15	18
Total	**86**	**79**	**7**	**172**	**51**	**65**	**11**	**127**	**123**	**121**	**244**	**260**	**265**	**18**	**543**
								Per cent							
Under 1	—	—	—	—	53	51	—	47	23	20	22	22	22	—	21
1–4	17	11	—	14	41	48	—	41	58	59	58	41	42	—	40
5–9	40	30	—	34	6	2	—	3	13	19	16	20	18	—	19
10–14	24	35	—	28	—	—	—	—	6	2	4	11	12	—	11
15+	16	22	43	20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	6	17	6
Unknown	2	1	57	4	—	—	100	9	—	—	—	1	—	83	3
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Note: Data from New South Wales and Western Australia include persons aged 18 years or older (14 in total).

Trends in adoption

There has been a substantial fall in the number of adoptions since the early 1970s (Figure 3), and the trend continued this year with the number of adoptions decreasing from 577 in 1997–98 to 543 in 1998–99. Factors contributing to this overall fall in adoptions of children include:

- effective birth control leading to a decrease in the number of unplanned pregnancies;
- the provision of income support for single parents and changed community attitudes to single parenthood, resulting in other alternatives to adoption;
- changes to legislation and practices in relation to step-parents within States and Territories whereby step-parents are encouraged to use arrangements other than adoption (refer to Bentley & Broadbent 1997, section 2.3);
- the introduction of alternative legal orders which transfer permanent guardianship and custody of a child to a person other than the parent (for example, permanent care orders in Victoria, see page 22).



Source: Table 2.

Figure 3: Adoptions in Australia: 1968–69 to 1998–99

Table 2: Adoptions by State and Territory, 1968–69 to 1998–99

Year	NSW [(a)]	Vic	Qld [(b)]	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
1968–69	1,715	1,789	1,448	540	797	348	100	36	6,773
1969–70	2,346	2,031	1,500	703	834	243	102	61	7,820
1970–71	3,275	2,057	1,562	301	879	289	122	68	8,553
1971–72	4,539	1,768	1,774	457	776	303	127	54	9,798
1972–73	3,315	1,765	1,678	717	649	268	121	29	8,542
1973–74	1,936	1,557	1,458	783	558	268	120	25	6,705
1974–75	1,799	1,168	1,394	528	551	243	123	33	5,839
1975–76	1,449	1,032	1,112	531	549	211	87	19	4,990
1976–77	1,770	908	1,014	497	658	185	82	74	5,188
1977–78	1,068	951	660	417	506	164	55	46	3,867
1978–79	1,020	956	563	380	415	173	56	40	3,603
1979–80	853	914	450	387	475	148	85	25	3,337
1980–81	794	711	454	305	505	140	74	35	3,018
1981–82	855	753	467	261	396	119	81	39	2,971
1982–83	926	692	555	270	424	117	59	29	3,072
1983–84	698	686	517	250	438	87	51	43	2,770
1984–85	623	631	331	293	222	97	74	23	2,294
1985–86	n.a.	n.a.	359	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1986–87	n.a.	n.a.	334	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1987–88	280	114	309	191	416	120	36	28	1,494
1988–89	335	288	353	147	221	85	47	25	1,501
1989–90	360	212	278	128	174	71	50	21	1,294
1990–91	329	258	210	136	103	61	25	20	1,142
1991–92	310	185	232	120	112	58	23	12	1,052
1992–93	209	101	222	87	111	23	20	10	783
1993–94	188	112	206	85	106	37	21	9	764
1994–95	260	145	179	127	108	12	18	6	855
1995–96	204	131	170	75	48	17	19	4	668
1996–97	263	123	129	56	79	30	26	3	709
1997–98	200	114	111	69	48	19	15	1	577
1998–99	**185**	**102**	**94**	**64**	**53**	**25**	**14**	**6**	**543**

(a) Data on adoptions by step-parents for New South Wales are not included from 1987–88 to 1993–94.

(b) Data for 1986–87 and 1987–88 differ from previous reports due to updated figures.

Sources: ABS1982a,1982b,1983,1984,1985,1986; WELSTAT 1990,1992a,1992b; AIHW 1999.