

Department of Social Services

Evaluation of the Intercountry Adoption Australia Support Service

Final Report August 2017



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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ACA	Australian Central Authority
AGD	Attorney General's Department
AHA	Australian Healthcare Associates
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DSS	Department of Social Services
IAA	Intercountry Adoption Australia
ICA	Intercountry Adoption
IDC	Inter Departmental committee
ISS	International Social Service
IVF	In-vitro fertilisation
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LifeWorks	LifeWorks Relationship Counselling and Education Services
n.d	No date
PAP	Prospective adoptive parent. In this report, this term is used to describe people involved in all stages of the ICA process from initial enquiry to the post-adoption phase
PM&C	Prime Minister and Cabinet
STCA	State and territory central authority
WWII	World War II

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Ad hoc adoption	Adoption from a country that is not an Australian partner country
Implementation Plan	Intercountry Adoption Reform Implementation Plan (Reform Implementation Plan)
Informant	Collective term to describe survey respondents and focus group participants
Parental respondents	Includes survey respondents who wanted to adopt through ICA (for the first time or as repeat applicants), those in the post-adoption phase and those who had decided not to continue with ICA
Wanting to adopt (category of survey respondent)	First time: A person wanting to adopt, or in the process of adopting, a child from overseas Repeat: A person who has already adopted some child/ children from overseas and is now seeking to adopt another child

1. Executive summary

1. Executive summary

1.1. Introduction

Recognising the complexities involved in the intercountry adoption (ICA) process, (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014), the Australian Government established the Intercountry Adoption Australia (IAA) service on 17 May 2015 as a national support service and a central point of contact for people at all stages of the ICA process. The IAA support service is operated by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and complements existing state and territory government services to assist people with the ICA process by providing information and access to support through two main mechanisms:

- A free 1800 information line operated by qualified social workers who provide general support, help with immigration, citizenship and passport processes, and referrals to support services, Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The information line is open from 9am to 5pm (AEST), Monday to Friday
- A national website which provides an overview of the ICA process, partner countries, things to consider when adopting, access to state or territory government information, and links to support services.

Eligibility rules for adoptions and processing of applications from prospective adoptive parents continue to be the responsibility of state and territory governments.

1.2. Evaluation objectives

This document reports on an independent review of the IAA support service undertaken by AHA in 2015–16. The review involved a synthesis of available data and collection and analysis of new data to assess whether the IAA service:

- Was implemented as intended
- Is achieving or is likely to achieve these intended outcomes:
 - Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents have access to information and referral to support services
 - Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents' experiences of the ICA process are positive
 - Adoptive parents' experience of immigration and passport processes are improved
 - The service informs ICA policies and practices.

1.3. Methods

A mixed-methods approach involving a combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources was used to conduct the evaluation. Information derived from multiple data sources was then triangulated to generate a synthesis of findings.

These data sources included a review of data provided by DSS and consultations with the following key stakeholders involved in the ICA process:

- Targeted service users via:
 - A national survey

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- Follow-up interviews with a subset of survey respondents who had used the IAA service and those who had not
- Telephone consultations with:
 - Commonwealth departments
 - STCAs
 - DSS Policy and Implementation teams
 - IAA staff
 - Academics
 - Parent support and advocacy groups.

1.4. Summary of findings in relation to the key evaluation questions:

1.4.1. Was IAA implemented as intended?

In this report, the implementation of IAA was assessed in terms of achievements related to the following items listed in the Implementation Plan (Reform Implementation Plan) (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*)(0):

- Milestones/deliverables specified in Tranche 2 (*Section 5.2*)
- Measures of success specific to the new support service (*Section 5.3*).

Achievements against specified milestones/deliverables

These milestones and deliverables were structured under three distinct elements:

- The 1800 information line
- The IAA website
- Referral pathways from the information line.

The evaluation found that IAA successfully delivered all milestones/deliverables related to each of the three service elements.

Achievements against specified measures of success

In the Reform Implementation Plan, 18 measures of success are specified that directly or indirectly apply to the IAA service (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*). These measures were categorised into the following four groups in this report:

- Service uptake
- Operational parameters
- Client satisfaction
- STCA feedback.

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Achievements related to each group of measures are summarised in the following sections.

Service uptake

- The IAA service exceeded uptake success measures specified in the Reform Implementation Plan in all four service key performance indicators (KPIs) as listed below:
 - More than 10 calls per month to the information line
 - More than 50 visits per month to the website
 - More than 50 email enquiries per month
 - At least 250 people subscribe to the IAA mailing list in the first year of operation
- The highest levels of web traffic were evident for the three largest states (NSW 27%, Victoria 21% and QLD 15%).

Operational parameters

- The KPI related to call answering time was exceeded, as more than 80% of calls are answered by information line staff within 20 seconds
- The following KPIs related to email response times were not measurable because of the quality of data available:
 - More than 80% of clients who agreed to be followed up received a call or email within 5 working days
 - More than 80% of email enquiries are responded to within 5 working days
- KPIs related to facilitated Commonwealth-related referrals and follow-up were found to be redundant because:
 - Interaction patterns between IAA and clients differed substantially from what had been anticipated prior to service implementation. Few clients who used the service sought facilitated referrals or follow up
 - Commonwealth partners applied strict referral criteria to warm referrals. Not all IAA enquiries met these criteria, and therefore could not be 'warmly' referred.

Client satisfaction

Multiple measures of success related to client satisfaction were specified in the Reform Implementation Plan (*Section 5.3.4*). However, significant limitations were identified in the IAA data which meant that the full extent of client interaction reported by IAA during consultations was not reflected in the information recorded.

Findings based on the IAA client data recorded in Sharepoint and survey responses are summarised below:

- Analysis of SharePoint entries for the period 17 May 2015 to 31 May 2016 indicated that a total of 3972 client interactions were recorded (*Table 5-8*). When n/a responses are excluded, 61.5% of all interactions were categorised as resolved (2214/3602) and only 1.6% (58/3602) were categorised as not having been resolved. This surrogate measure suggests high levels of satisfaction with the service overall

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- These figures suggest high levels of satisfaction with the service overall. Limitations in how client data was recorded within Sharepoint prevented a more refined analysis of satisfaction rates (*Section 5.3.4*)
- Survey respondents' perceptions of the usefulness of IAA was evident in the range of benefits listed, which included IAA providing:
 - Easy access to information
 - Additional support
 - An independent agency (separate from their STCA) to talk with

As outlined in Section 4.1.2, two denominators are used in reporting findings. First, the percentage of total parental respondents and second, the proportion of responses that relate to a subset of the variable e.g. service users

- Overall, almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) indicated that they had used the 1800 information line (*Table 5-9*). Those wanting to adopt for the first time accounted for the greatest proportion of information line users (31/42, 73.8%)
- Half of the 42 respondents who reported having used the information line rated the information provided as either very useful or useful (21/42, 50.0%) (*Table 5-10*)
- Overall, almost 60% of the total parental respondents (131/220) had used the IAA website (*Table 5-11*). Highest usage was evident among those wanting to adopt for the first time (81/131, 61.8%) and in the post-adoption phase (27/131, 20.6%).
- Of those who had used the website, 61.8% (81/131) rated the website information as very useful or useful (*Table 6-9*)
- No complaints were received about the IAA service between May 2015 and May 2016
- Less than 1% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes.

STCA feedback

- Discussions with STCA representatives highlighted a lack of clarity at STCA and client level regarding the role of IAA in ICA. This was particularly true during the early implementation phase where this lack of clarity resulted in:
 - STCAs being concerned about service duplication
 - Some STCAs being unable to understanding/differentiation between IAA's role and that of AGD, thus making transitioning from AGD to IAA as the central information/contact point problematic in some cases
- Factors contributing to this role confusion were:
 - The Commonwealth-state agreement in place at the time predated the establishment of IAA. As a result, no formal agreement existed that documented IAA's role and governed relationships between stakeholders
 - Media coverage during the early implementation phase generated unrealistic expectations of ICA processes, ICA reforms and the role of IAA
- A number of STCA representatives acknowledged that IAA has played a dual role in improving STCA staff and client understanding of ICA generally.

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1.4.2. Post-implementation IAA service delivery developments

Since its initial implementation, the IAA has been responsive to ongoing feedback and evolved beyond the original parameters specified in the Reform Implementation Plan (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*). Examples of the developments to date are:

- DSS teams have been restructured so that there is now one team which includes the IAA service and policy functions. This will allow the IAA service to directly provide input to ICA policy decisions
- Expansion of client service provision to include greater focus on all types of intercountry adoption and stages in the intercountry adoption process, including expatriate, relative and ad hoc adoptions, and support for adult adoptees. Non-ICA-related adoption enquires, such as domestic adoption and IVF information, are also received
- In July and August 2016, IAA undertook service visits to the STCAs and local service providers to increase face-to-face engagement and clarify the role of IAA
- The IAA website now includes information on citizenship and passports for adoptees as a response to enquiries and feedback.

The following activities are currently underway:

- Addressing specific stakeholder needs including expatriate stakeholders and post-adoption support
- Development of an online eligibility tool
- Scoping of a new client record management system.

Additionally:

- LifeWorks and International Social Services (ISS) have been engaged to assist families and children involved in adoption, and adoptees with post adoption support, counselling and family reunification
- In April 2016, a commitment was given to revise the Commonwealth-state agreement. This will clarify IAA's role in relation to state and territory governments and other Commonwealth agencies. This work is being progressed by the Commonwealth and STCAs with a view to finalisation of a new agreement by late 2017.

1.4.3. Are prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents' experiences of the ICA process positive?

Achievements regarding access to information and referral to support services are discussed separately in the following sections.

Access to information

Four elements of access to information were considered in this report:

- Stakeholder assessment of the contribution of IAA to information access
- Uptake issues

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- Comprehensiveness of the information provided
- Client expectations.

Non-parental stakeholders' assessment of IAA's contribution to information access

Non-parental stakeholders differed in their assessment of the contribution this information made to the ICA community:

- *Commonwealth stakeholders:*
 - Generally agreed that IAA has improved access to information
 - Considered the phone service as particularly useful
- *At STCA level:*
 - The IAA website was seen as important precursor to STCA contact and provided clients with information in a more user-friendly format than had previously been available
 - Some queried the value-add of this information because it was also available on the AGD website
- *Academics* welcomed the provision of a centralised information service.

Overall, any duplication of information provision to service users by IAA and the Commonwealth agencies/STCAs was not seen to be problematic because the complex nature of ICA meant there was a need for service users to triangulate and confirm advice/information from multiple sources.

Uptake issues

- Underutilisation of the 1800 information line was evident with 75.5% (166/220) of survey respondents indicating they had not used the 1800 information line
- The two main reasons cited by non-users for not having used the IAA 1800 information line were that respondents did not know about the service (63/166, 38.0%) or that they had contacted their STCA directly (47/166, 28.31%)
- More than one-third of all survey respondents (36.8%, 81/220) had not used the website
- The two main reasons for not having used the IAA website were that the service did not exist when the respondent had started the process (35/81, 43.2%) or that respondents did not know about the service (32/81, 39.5%).

Comprehensiveness of the information provided

IAA's primary focus on the information needs of prospective adoptive parents during the service's initial implementation phase was seen by many of the external stakeholders to limit the comprehensiveness of the information provided. In particular, gaps were identified in relation to adult adoptees, expatriate adoptions and ad hoc adoptions.

Parent support and advocacy groups highlighted the importance of web information being accurate and comprehensive.

For academic informants, a key consideration was the need for IAA to recognise that the information needs of ICA stakeholders differ considerably depending on their stage in the process.

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Client expectations

Stakeholders indicated that client assessment of the utility of available information was generally influenced by their expectations, some of which were unrealistic.

1.4.4. Are adoptive parents' experiences of immigration and passport processes improved?

IAA's role as a conduit between clients and immigration and passport processes was seen as the key means whereby clients' experiences had been improved in this area.

1.4.5. Does the service inform ICA policies and practices?

Discussions with IAA senior management indicated that the service contributes to ICA policies and practices through a number of mechanisms. Consultations with external stakeholders clearly illustrated these stakeholders were unaware of IAA's work in these areas (*Section 6.5.2*).

1.5. Implications of findings – key considerations going forward

The findings of this evaluation indicate that IAA has:

- Achieved all milestones and deliverables specified in the Reform Implementation Plan
- Achieved or is demonstrating strong progress in relation to most of the measures of success and KPIs specified in the Reform Implementation Plan.

However, it is also apparent that:

- Many of the KPIs are now redundant as the patterns of client interaction and the evolving nature of service provision extend beyond that which was envisaged prior to implementation. A review of KPIs is warranted
- Current data collection and management systems require review so that data capture and analysis potential is enhanced
- STCAs have lacked clarity about the role of IAA and IAA activities particularly in the area of policy and practice
- Increased data sharing between IAA and STCAs would be beneficial so that referral outcomes can be established and greater transparency is engendered
- Uptake of IAA services by targeted service users has been limited by:
 - A lack of awareness about IAA
 - Lack of differentiation between IAA and other ICA stakeholders (STCAS and AGD in particular) which may have caused confusion
 - A perception in the early stages that the service was primarily targeting prospective adoptive parents.

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Revisions to the Commonwealth-state agreement will clarify IAA's role in relation to state and territory governments and other Commonwealth agencies.

Going forward, a number of factors warrant consideration to facilitate the ongoing development of IAA and ensure its capacity to meet its KPIs and the expectations of the ICA community. Key considerations include:

- Review current KPIs to more accurately reflect the current and future scope of IAA's activities
- Review current data collection and management system so that its capacity to capture and analyse data is enhanced
- Increased data sharing between IAA and STCAs so that referral outcomes can be established
- Continued engagement with STCAs to:
 - Further consolidate working relationships
 - Communicate IAA activities, particularly in relation to policy and practice, and to jointly collaborate in the development of these policies and practice
 - Promote IAA on STCA websites. At the time of the website review undertaken in this evaluation, not all STCAs currently did so (*Table 3-3*) and this may impact on client awareness of the IAA services in these jurisdictions
- Greater promotion of IAA so that its target clients are aware of the breadth of its services
- Clarification of IAA's role. This not only involves clarifying IAA's role in relation to other Commonwealth agencies through revisions to the Commonwealth-state agreement, but also in the public perception by differentiating its functions from AGD. Ongoing engagement with target clients will assist in this regard as would revision to the web content on both the IAA and AGD websites.

The list of factors presented above directly aligns with IAA's KPIs and to the gaps identified in this evaluation. Consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders identified a number of key suggestions for consideration going forward (*Chapter 7*). These latter suggestions give voice to some of the needs and visions of other key stakeholders in the ICA community and warrant further consideration.

2. Introduction

2. Introduction

2.1. Defining ICA

Adoption is a legal process of transferring rights and responsibilities from a child's parents to their adoptive parents (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). One mechanism by which this occurs is through intercountry adoption (ICA)—also referred to as international and transnational adoption—which involves the adoption of a child who is a national of a different country to that of the adoptive parents.

2.2. Historical perspective

ICA is largely a post-World War II (WWII) phenomenon, which initially evolved as a humanitarian response to help children orphaned by WWII and later by the Korean and Vietnam Wars (Young 2012a). In the Australian context, ICA formally commenced with the Saigon baby lift in April 1975 (Cuthbert et al. 2010a, Fronck 2012). From the 1970s onwards, ICA became an increasingly sought after option for prospective parents in Australia for two key reasons:

- First, social and economic changes meant that fewer children, especially young babies, became available for adoption domestically. Key among these changes were the introduction of the Single Parent's Support Benefit, the increased availability of contraception, greater social acceptance and de-stigmatisation of illegitimacy, and access to procedures to address infertility issues such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and surrogacy arrangements. There has also been a reduction in the number of available adoptees and an increase in the number of families seeking to adopt.
- Second, issues related to past child welfare and adoption practices, coupled with legislative reforms that made adoptions more open¹ in terms of information and contact, reduced the attractiveness of domestic adoption for prospective adoptive parents (Young 2012b). Increased public awareness of the horrendous experiences of groups of 'removed children' including Indigenous Australians (the Stolen Generation), non-Indigenous Australians (Forgotten Australians) and child migrants from Britain and Malta further fuelled this reluctance to adopt domestically.

ICA is guided by Australia's commitment to the *Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption* (Section 2.4.1).

2.3. Recent trends

In Australia, during the 1999–00 and 2010–11 periods, the number of finalised ICAs each year exceeded that of domestic adoptions (local and known adoptions combined). Between 1999–00 and 2004–05, the proportion of ICAs increased from 53% to 74%, with the highest number of ICAs (434) in 2004–05.

Since then, however, the number of ICAs has steadily decreased with the result that since 2011–12, more children have been adopted domestically than from overseas. This long-term decline was evident in most states and territories throughout Australia with only New South Wales and Queensland reporting a small rise between 2013–14 and 2014–15, and numbers in South Australia remaining the

¹ Openness in adoption facilitated access to previously closed birth and identity records by parties to the adoption and introduced measures whereby the adoptee and birth family could have on-going contact with each other in appropriate and negotiated circumstances (Cuthbert et al. 2010b).

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same (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). In 2014–15, Australia reported its lowest number of finalised adoptions on record (292), of which 83 (28%) were ICAs² (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

All 83 intercountry adoptees in 2014–15 were younger than ten years of age, with more than two-thirds (67%) aged less than five years. A decline in the number of infants needing ICA meant that only eight (10%) were aged under 12 months. Consistent with previous years, more than half (55%) of these children were male (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

These Australian figures reflect global trends, where the numbers of ICAs declined by 17 per cent between 2004–07, from a peak of 45,000 per year in 2004 (Selman 2009).

Reasons for the decline included changing economic and social factors that decrease the number of children from other countries needing adoption in Australia as well as changes to the nature of agreements between Australia and other countries.

In particular, the *Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*, signed by Australia in 1998, represented international efforts to ensure that ICA only occurs in the best interests of the child. This included emphasis on consideration of placement options within the child’s own country as well as measures to prevent the abduction, sale and trafficking of children (Hague Conference on Private International Law 2016).

With these changes, the characteristics of available adoptees has also changed, with a current emphasis in most Australian ICA programmes on older children, siblings groups and/or children with special needs (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

2.4. Recent Australian ICA reforms

2.4.1. Antecedents of the recent reforms

In 1998, Australia ratified the Hague Convention, and, in the same year, a Commonwealth-state agreement for its implementation was signed, defining how the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department (AGD)—as the Australian Central Authority (ACA) under the Hague Convention—would work with the state and territory central authorities (STCAs) to facilitate ICA (see *Section 3.3* for further detail). The agreement was renegotiated in 2008, in response to recommendations of a 2005 report on ICA from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services (House Standing Committee on Family and Human Services 2005).

An ICA ‘harmonisation working group’, chaired by AGD with representation from each STCA, was set up in 2008 to “progress the harmonisation of ICA legislation and administrative procedures, to achieve best practice”. While the working group achieved some successes in better aligning some policy and practice issues and developing communications and resources, there still remains inconsistencies between procedures, participation in country programs, eligibility criteria and fees involved in the intercountry adoption process in each jurisdiction (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

In late 2013, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet announced the establishment of an Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) on ICA, including representation from the Department of Social

² AIHW reports do not include expatriate or known child adoptions as a part of their intercountry adoption statistics (AIHW, 2015)

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Services (DSS), the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP). The aim of the IDC was to “provide strategic direction and coordination to the further development and implementation of the new national model” for ICA, with DSS as the lead (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*).

In 2014, the IDC released a report detailing issues in the current ICA process in Australia and outlining key recommendations for reform. The terms of reference for the IDC included identification of:

- Current impediments to ICA
- Options for immediate improvement and streamlining of ICA service delivery to make ICA “easier and faster” for Australian couples
- Recommended longer-term reforms
- Potential partner countries for new ICA programmes
- Alternative arrangements for delivering ICA programmes
- Changes to Commonwealth or state legislation that would improve and streamline the process (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

While the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) originally agreed in principle to the establishment of a new national model for ICA service provision (Council of Australian Governments 2014a), by October it confirmed that STCAs would retain responsibility for ICA processes (Council of Australian Governments 2014b).

2.4.2. Australia's current ICA reform

The recommendations of the IDC resulted in the introduction of a range of measures designed to “reduce the barriers facing Australian families wanting to adopt from overseas” (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department n.d.). Three tranches of reform were identified, including governance arrangements, the establishment of a new support service (see *Section 2.4.3*), research to build the evidence base and improving existing programs (including enhancement of in-country support) and establishing new overseas programs (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*)

As part of the reforms, legislative changes have recently been passed to simplify citizenship processes for children adopted through bilateral ICA arrangements (i.e. currently those from South Korea or Taiwan), to match processes already in place for Hague Convention ICAs. These changes allow these children to attain citizenship and an Australian passport prior to entering Australia (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department n.d.).

In addition, new ICA programs have been opened with Bulgaria (in May 2016), Poland and Latvia (both in November 2015).

2.4.3. Intercountry Adoption Australia (IAA)

In January 2015, in response to the 2014 IDC report, the establishment of a new service, Intercountry Adoption Australia (IAA) was announced. Funding for family support services was also announced which resulted in the appointment of LifeWorks, in partnership with ISS Australia, to deliver a broad range of counselling, education and support services nationally to help families engaged in intercountry

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adoption, and children and families after the adoption is finalised (Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2015).

IAA was launched in May 2015 with DSS as the lead agency. Locating the IAA team within DSS represented a new model of service delivery for the Department because DSS is not usually involved in direct service delivery.

IAA's functions include:

- A free 1800 information line operated by qualified social workers who provide general support and information in relation to ICA processes immigration, citizenship and passport processes, and referrals to support services, Commonwealth, state and territory governments
- A national website (www.intercountryadoption.gov.au) that provides an overview of the ICA process, partner countries, things to consider when adopting, access to state or territory government information, and links to support services.

Under the Reform Implementation Plan, the tranche of reforms relating to the new service included:

- Establishing referral pathways and positive working relationships with relevant Commonwealth and state/territory government agencies (e.g. STCAs, DFAT, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) and AGD)
- Delivering tailored visa, citizenship and passport information and support
- Providing additional funding to family support service providers for the delivery of dedicated ICA support services.

It is important to note however, that IAA has no formal mandate under the 2008 Commonwealth-state agreement (although this is currently being reconsidered by the relevant authorities) (Intercountry Adoption Central Authorities 2016). Consequently, the requirement for IAA to establish or improve referral pathways and positive working relationships with STCAs in particular, occurred without formalised relationships in place.

The implementation of the IAA service coincided with improved support mechanisms from other relevant agencies, as outlined in *Section 2.4.2*, including the establishment of dedicated positions or teams within DIBP and DFAT to assist individuals referred by the new service and dedicated DFAT staff in key ICA posts overseas to improve communication with programme partners (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*).

The establishment of IAA, along with other ICA reforms, was guided by a Reform Implementation Plan developed by DSS and approved by all members of the Intercountry Adoption IDC, including both DSS and AGD. The plan noted that “while DSS is the lead agency responsible for implementation of the programme, AGD, DFAT and DIBP have key roles and responsibilities to support successful implementation”. The plan identified ten measures of success for the new service including indicators of service use, responsiveness, appropriate referral and user satisfaction. Achievements related to these measures of success are presented in *Section 5*.

Further details on how ICA is operationalised in Australia and IAA's role within ICA processes are outlined in *Section 3*.

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3.1. Overview

This chapter provides an overview of ICA processes in Australia to contextualise both the operational environment in which IAA was established (and now delivers services), and the complexity of ICA processes for prospective ICA clients.

In Australia, ICA processes involve a mix of overseas and local stakeholders (see *Section 3.3*):

- Overseas stakeholders including country of origin central/responsible authorities
- Local stakeholders include a mix of Commonwealth and jurisdictional agencies, including AGD:
 - STCAs are responsible for assessing prospective ICA parents, accepting applications and liaising with countries of origin
 - Australian ICA clients must also liaise with DIBP and DFAT on matters related to visas, citizenship and passports.

The roles and responsibilities of each of these stakeholders are described in the following sections.

For prospective adoptive parents, the process of ICA involves multiple phases, each of which involves engagement with a number of these stakeholders. For many, this generates a complex system that can be difficult to navigate and this has been a source of frustration for adoptive parents (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014). Similar processes are in place for relative adoptions, known non-relative adoptions, subsequent sibling adoptions and ad hoc requests (for adoption of a child from a country with which Australia does not have an ICA programme), although they must still comply with the Hague Convention and are still considered by and facilitated through the relevant overseas agency and STCAs (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department n.d.).

It should be noted that expatriate adoptions—i.e. those arranged by an Australian citizen or permanent residents residing overseas—are facilitated through an overseas agency rather than an Australian STCA (although Australian legal requirements must be met for the adoption to be finalised and visas/citizenship arranged). Adoptions arranged through private adoption agencies occur outside of Australia's ICA program.

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

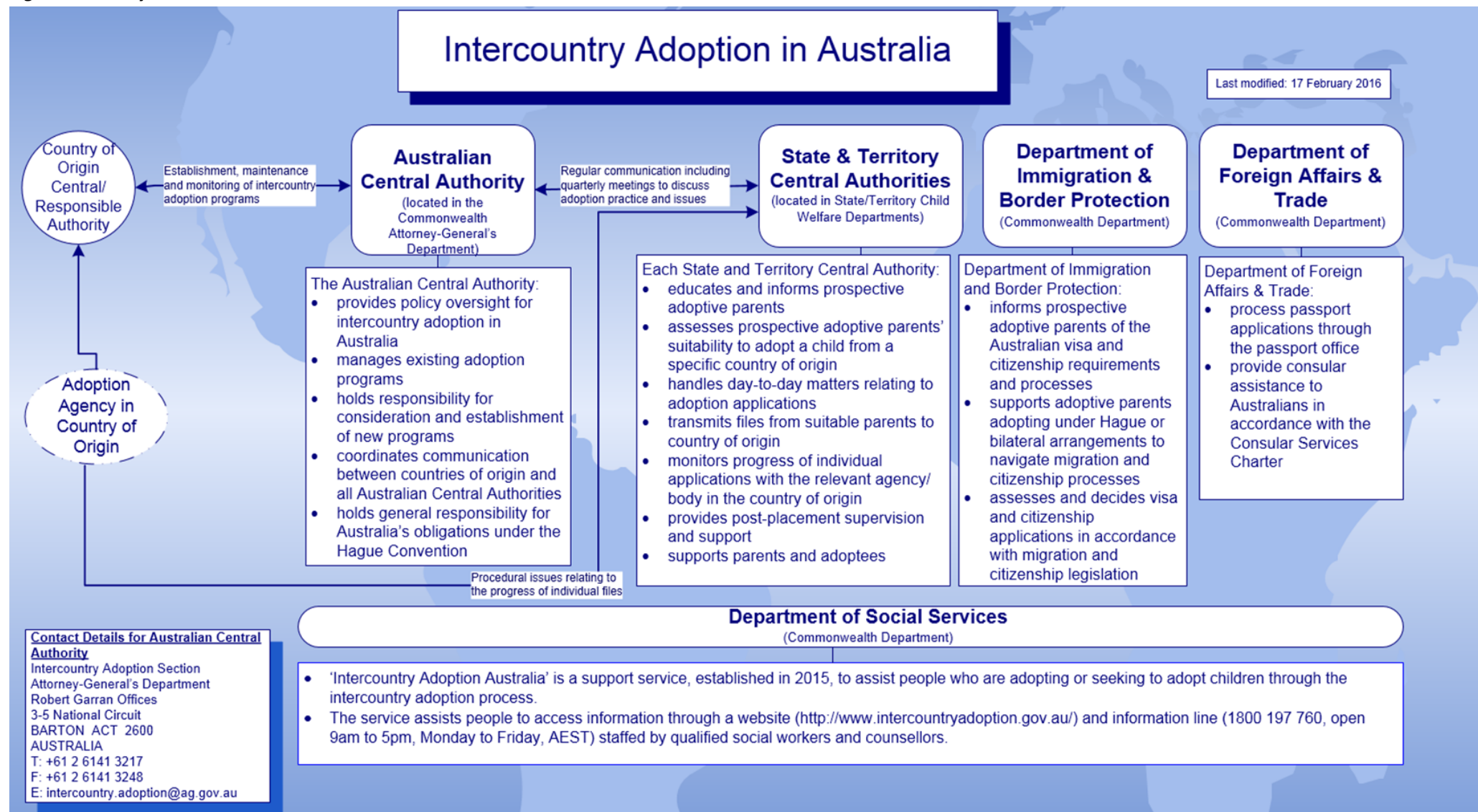
Table 3-1: General process for ICA in Australia

Phase	Processes involved	Agencies involved
Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial enquiry • Education seminars • Formal applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STCA
Processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suitability assessment and approval decision by both the Australian STCA and the overseas country • Sending of documents to country of child's origin • Placement proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STCA • Country of origin CA/ responsible agency
Finalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration application • Travel to meet child • Beginning of post-placement support • Finalisation of adoption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DIBP • DFAT • STCA • Post-adoption support services in Australia

Source: (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015)

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

Figure 3-1: Key administration stakeholders in ICA in Australia



Source: Attorney-General's Department, *Roles and responsibilities of central authorities*.

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3.2. Australia's ICA program partners

The vast majority of ICAs in Australia occur through programs established with partner countries that are signatories to the Hague Convention or through bilateral arrangements with non-Hague signatories. In the case of the latter, however, compliance with the standards of the Hague Convention must still be ensured.

In very rare cases, STCAs may agree to facilitate a relative, known child or ad hoc adoption through a non-partner country. In such cases, the adoption must be consistent with Hague principles.

These arrangements determine the main overseas countries (program partners) from which prospective adoptive parents in Australia can adopt.

Australia's ICA program partner arrangements are dynamic. Some arrangements have been in place for a long period of time while others commenced more recently. In addition, some program arrangements have been put on hold or closed while some former partner countries have imposed adoption bans or freezes. With the opening of a new program with Bulgaria in May 2016, Australia currently has open ICA programs with 13 other countries (see *Table 3-2*).

Table 3-2: Australia's ICA program status as at 31 August 2016

Open programs		Possible new country program (under investigation)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bulgaria• Chile• China• Colombia• Hong Kong• Latvia• Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poland• South Africa• South Korea• Sri Lanka• Taiwan• Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vietnam
On hold or closed programs		Countries imposing adoption bans or freezes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bolivia• Ethiopia• Fiji	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• India• Lithuania	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cambodia• Kenya

Source: (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department n.d.)

3.2.1. Trends over time

The proportions for ICAs by countries of origin have changed considerably over time. In 2005-06, most ICAs in Australia involved children from China (27.5%) and South Korea (24.5%). ICA of children from these countries accounted for more than half of all ICAs in that period, but have been declining since, accounting for only 8% of ICAs in 2014-15 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

In 2014–15, the majority (94%) of Australia's 83 finalised ICAs were children from Asian countries and the remainder (6%) were from South American countries. The most common countries of origin in this period were Taiwan (36%), the Philippines (27%) and Thailand (16%) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015).

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3.3. How ICA is operationalised in Australia

3.3.1. Country of origin central/responsible authorities

ICA clients must not only meet the Australian STCA requirements in the state they live but also those of the overseas country from which a child is adopted. Each country has its own unique set of requirements and eligibility criteria that must be met by prospective ICA clients. These include factors such as age, marital status and family situation, education, income and health (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

Country of origin Central/responsible Authorities, Australia's ICA program partners, process ICA applications overseas in which the child lives.

3.3.2. The Australian Central Authority

In Australia, the Australian Central Authority (ACA) for the purposes of the Hague Convention is located within the Family Law Branch of the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). In addition to ensuring Australia's compliance with its responsibilities under the Hague Convention, the ACA's role also includes:

- Providing national policy leadership and coordination
- Managing and reviewing existing overseas adoption programs
- Establishing new overseas adoption programs where appropriate.

The AGD's role as the ACA sits within a broader portfolio of legislation and policy on families and marriage. The AGD is also responsible for a range of functions including civil and criminal justice and national security and emergency management.

The AGD also collects six-monthly data to inform a snapshot of national ICA statistics, containing de-identified data including approved ICA applications, files sent overseas and placement proposals accepted (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department n.d.).

Prior to the establishment of the ACA within the Attorney-General's Department in 2006, each state and territory in Australia had developed their own partnerships with overseas programs (Department of Human Services Victoria 2015). The state-territory agreement renegotiated in 2008 specified that the Australian Government would assume responsibility (from the states) for establishing and managing international ICA arrangements within 12 months of the agreement being signed (Commonwealth-state Agreement for the Continued Operation of Australia's intercountry Adoption Program 2008).

The ACA ensures Australia's compliance under the Hague Convention and is responsible for managing/ establishing overseas ICA programs.

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3.3.3. State/territory central authorities

Jurisdictional/Commonwealth arrangements

The 2008 *Commonwealth-State Agreement for the Continued Operation of Australia's ICA Program* outlines the agreed roles and responsibilities of the Australian and state/territory governments with respect to ICA (*Commonwealth-state agreement for the continued operation of australia's intercountry adoption program 2008*). Under this Arrangement, state and territory central authorities (STCAs) support the ACA and are responsible for processing ICA applications made in their jurisdiction.

*Processing of ICAs is the responsibility of each STCA.
Each Australian state and territory has its own legislation and processes governing ICA.*

STCA-specific functions

The functions of the STCAs include:

- Operating as state and territory central authorities under the Hague Convention
- Providing education and information for prospective ICA clients (see *Section 3.3.4*)
- Preparing and supporting prospective adoptive parents for ICA
- Assessing adoption applications
- Providing:
 - Advice and assistance about procedural aspects of programs
 - Post-placement supervision and support
 - Support for both parents and adoptees
- Considering requests to adopt children from countries with which Australia does not have an existing ICA program (including ad hoc, relative and known-child adoptions).

As each Australian state and territory has its own legislation and processes governing ICA, there are significant discrepancies between procedures, participation in country programmes, eligibility criteria and fees (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014, p. 4).

Other relevant authorities

In addition to the authorities above, Australian adoptive families must also liaise with the following agencies:

- DIBP — to assess and process visa and citizenship applications for adopted children
- DFAT — passport and other assistance for adoptive families. DFAT, in partnership with other relevant government agencies, is also responsible for developing, maintaining and enhancing Australia's ICA programs (Intercountry Adoption Australia n.d.).

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3.3.4. Information and support services

IAA

The IAA support service was established in 2015 as a central point of contact and ‘one-stop shop’ for Australians seeking information about ICA (*Section 2.4*). Its website provides information about ICA, the process, details about Australia’s ICA programs and links to STCAs and other relevant resources. Its national phone information line and online contact form are designed to:

- Facilitate the dissemination of information and referrals to relevant agencies
- Help people navigate the complexities of ICA, particularly for non-standard cases, such as relative adoption
- Provides information and support on infertility issues, grief and loss, alternate family formation issues, post adoption and adult adoptee supports.

STCAs

As noted above, STCAs are responsible for providing education and information for prospective ICA clients and providing advice and assistance around procedural aspects of ICA. However, how these functions are achieved, and the level of information available to prospective ICA clients through STCA websites varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. A summary of the information and linkages available through STCA websites is provided in *Table 3-3*.

Further insight into jurisdictional differences in the delivery of introductory information sessions to prospective adoptive parents were identified during discussions with STCA representatives. For example, as noted in *Table 3-3*, attendance at information sessions is mandatory in some jurisdictions before applications can be accepted (with this requirement noted on STCA websites in the ACT, NSW and SA). Frequency of information sessions differs, ranging from twice-yearly in NSW and the ACT, to quarterly in Queensland, Tasmania and WA. In the NT, information sessions are replaced by a personal interview (of 1.5–2 hours duration) with each prospective adoptive parent, during which relevant information is conveyed. Similarly, in Victoria, information sessions have recently been replaced by personal interviews.

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

Table 3-3: State/territory central authorities—information sources available to people interested/involved in ICA (current as at 31 August 2016)

STCA	Departmental location	Dedicated webpage/s	Downloadable information	Information sessions (mentioned on website or downloads)	Links to				Notes / other resources
					IAA	AGD	DFAT	DIBP	
ACT	Adoptions and Permanent Care Unit, ACT Community Services	✓	✓	An ‘information seminar program’ must be attended before applications for assessment/approval can be accepted		✓			
NSW	Intercountry Adoption Program, Adoption Services (Pre-adoption), Department of Family and Community Services; Adoption Information Unit (post-adoption), Department of Family and Community Services	✓	✓	First time applicants must attend a ‘preparation for adoption’ seminar (2 days plus additional day for adoption of older or special needs children). From 2017 the seminar will be 3 consecutive days incorporating the older child and special needs issues)	✓	✓		✓	Link to fact sheets on fees and costs for ICA and ICA hardship policy Links to support services
NT	Adoption Unit, Department of Children and Families	✓		On demand					Limited information available on ICA: list of ICA programme countries and link to Hague Convention website
QLD	Adoptions Services, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services	✓	✓	Prospective parents “encouraged to attend” information session (covering both domestic and ICA)	✓	✓			Queensland and ICA Handbook “available upon request” when preliminary scan undertaken (March 2016)—since made available online Downloadable forms ‘Adoption Expression of Interest’ and ‘Guide to completing an adoption expression of interest form’

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

STCA	Departmental location	Dedicated webpage/s	Downloadable information	Information sessions (mentioned on website or downloads)	Links to				Notes / other resources
					IAA	AGD	DFAT	DIBP	
									<p>Separate webpages contain information about adoption fees and adoption information sessions</p> <p>Several videos (and their transcripts) are available to view from the information sessions webpage, with titles including 'ICA: Dylan and Gillian's story', 'The realities of adoption', 'Requirements for ICA' and 'Understanding the adoption process'</p>
SA	Placement Services, Families SA, Department for Education and Child Development	✓	✓	Information sessions are held 'regularly' and must be attended before an expression of interest can be submitted	✓	✓			Six-page information sheet on ICA process and 28-page booklet on ICA available for download
Tas	Adoption and Permanency Services, Department of Health and Human Services	✓		Persons interested in attending an information session can contact STCA through link provided	✓	✓			Links provided to the Hague Convention on Intercountry adoption and the UN convention on the rights of the child
Vic	Department of Health and Human Services: Intercountry Adoption Victoria (IAV) - arranges intercountry adoptions Family Information Networks & Discovery (FIND), Department of Human Services	✓	✓	Pre-application information sessions no longer held. Attendance at education groups (3 days) is a mandatory requirement to proceed once an application has undergone initial screening and clearance and prior to assessment phase		✓		✓	Website being updated and scheduled to be launched in October 2016. ICA Information kit (42 pp), self-assessment tool and mandatory questionnaire and ICA Victoria assessment standards available online Dedicated page outlining challenges of ICA ICA newsletter, last published May 2015, including current statistics and reference/links to:

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

STCA	Departmental location	Dedicated webpage/s	Downloadable information	Information sessions (mentioned on website or downloads)	Links to				Notes / other resources
					IAA	AGD	DFAT	DIBP	
									<p>Mini library—a small collection of books than can be mailed to interested families on a loan basis</p> <p>Intercountry Adoptee Voices website</p> <p>Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (pcafamilies.org.au)—a Victorian support service that currently advertises a pilot program to foster relationships between young intercountry adoptees and adult intercountry adoptees</p>
WA	<p>Fostering and Adoption Services (includes local and intercountry adoptions, and post adoption services)</p> <p>Department for Child Protection and Family Support</p>	✓			✓	✓			IAA referred to as 'Adoption Australia'

Note: Scan of websites performed July 2016. Comparison to preliminary scan undertaken in March 2016 suggests that there may be signs of continual improvement—e.g. online availability of Queensland's 'Queensland and ICA Handbook'. Table content was confirmed with STCAs in September 2016

3. Current ICA processes in Australia

3.3.5. Other key stakeholders

The Attorney-General's Department (Australian Government Attorney-General's Department n.d.) and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection n.d.) also provide ICA information on their websites.

In addition to these, there are a number of non-government support and advocacy organisations relevant to ICA parents and children, such as the parent support group ICA Resource Network (ICARN), International Social Service (ISS) Australia, Barnardos Australia, The Benevolent Society, CREATE Foundation, Relationships Australia SA's post-adoption support service, International Adoptee Community, Jigsaw, Adopted Vietnamese International, Australian African Children's Aid and Support Association and Families with Children from China (Australia), as well as state- and territory-based organisations and groups (Adopt Change n.d.). Many of these also play an advocacy role in relation to ICA.

4. Evaluation approach and methods

4. Evaluation approach and methods

4.1. Overview

4.1.1. Approach

A mixed-methods approach involving a combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources was used to conduct the evaluation. Information derived from multiple data sources was then triangulated to generate a synthesis of findings. A brief literature and web scan was also undertaken to identify key challenges and considerations relating to ICA (ICA), as well as the information and support needs of potential and actual ICA clients (*Appendix A*).

Details of data sources, stakeholder recruitment and participation, and data analysis processes are provided in the following sections. Limitations of the data and evaluability issues related to the evaluation are discussed in *Section 4.5*.

4.1.2. Caveat regarding the presentation of findings

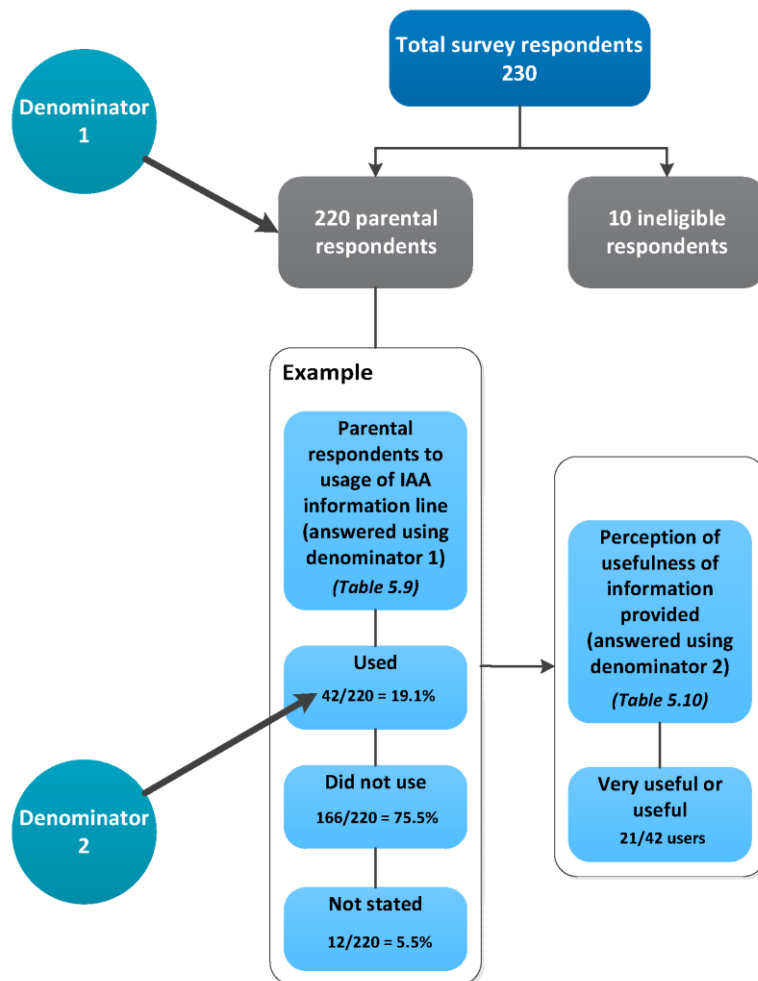
Please note:

- The analysis presented in the following sections relates to the 220 parental respondents who were either considering ICA, had already adopted or had decided not to proceed. Responses from the five ineligible respondents and the five adult adoptees are excluded from the descriptive statistics in this section
- All respondents did not answer all survey questions
- Two denominators are used to present data:
 - Denominator 1 represents the 220 parental respondents. This provides consistency across tables, and comparability across sub-groups of the parental respondent population, which was a focus of the evaluation. This value is generally presented first in the narrative
 - Denominator 2 is the subset of denominator 1 that responded to a particular component of the question e.g. the denominator becomes those who used the service, those who answer in the affirmative, etc.

A worked example is provided in *Figure 4-1* below.

4. Evaluation approach and methods

Figure 4-1: Relationship between denominators used in analysis



4.2. Data sources

Multiple data sources were used to address the key evaluation questions (Section 1.2):

These data sources included consultations with the following key stakeholders involved in the ICA process:

- Targeted service users via:
 - A national survey
 - Follow-up interviews with a subset of survey respondents who had used the IAA service and those who had not
- Telephone consultations with:
 - Commonwealth departments
 - STCAs
 - DSS Policy and Implementation teams
 - IAA staff
 - Academics
 - Parent support and advocacy groups.

4. Evaluation approach and methods

Additionally, a review of data provided by DSS was also undertaken. This included:

- IAA client data for the period May 2015 – May 2016
- IAA web analytics data for the period 17 May 2015 – 30 June 2016.

4.3. Stakeholder recruitment and participation

4.3.1. Consultation process

An initial contact list was provided by DSS for many of the key stakeholder groups. This list was further expanded in terms of possible parent support and advocacy groups to be considered during our preliminary contact with STCAs.

Non-service users such as Commonwealth and STCA representatives, parent support and advocacy groups, and academics were first contacted by telephone to invite their participation in the evaluation. This was followed up by an email in cases where attempts to contact stakeholders by telephone had been unsuccessful.

IAA client records provided the primary source of contact for those who had used the IAA service and who had given prior consent to be contacted for research purposes. The majority of contact with this group was by email as this was the most common preferred mode of contact indicated. A small number of telephone contacts were made.

STCAs and parent support and advocacy groups were approached to assist in the promotion and circulation of details of the online survey (*Section 4.3.2*).

4.3.2. Online survey

An online survey, developed by AHA and pilot tested by a small number of IAA clients, was approved by the Department prior to circulation. This survey targeted people at all stages in the ICA process (including adult adoptees) irrespective of whether they have used IAA or not. Ethical clearance from a Human Research Ethics Committee was not required for this project.

The survey was distributed to 324 IAA clients who had provided consent to be contacted. The survey was circulated in May 2016 and closed on 30 June 2016.

4.3.3. Participation summary

A breakdown of participant numbers by stakeholder group is provided in *Table 4-1*. A total of 275 people had input into the evaluation. Further participant details are provided in *Appendix B*.

4. Evaluation approach and methods

Table 4-1: Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder	No. of Participants
Commonwealth departments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade• Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet• Attorney General’s Department• Department of Immigration and Border Protection	9
DSS Policy and implementation teams Current IAA service staff	13
State and Territory Central Authorities	13
Academics	3
Support/advocacy groups	4
Recently engaged services	3
IAA target service users Survey respondents (n=230) In-depth interviews with a subset of survey recipients who had: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used IAA (n=28)• Not used IAA (n=11)	230
Total number of participants	275

4.4. Data analysis process

Quantitative data derived from the survey and the web analytics were systematically analysed and a series of descriptive statistics produced.

A thematic analysis was conducted of the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended survey responses and from the consultations with stakeholders using the three stage approach to qualitative data analysis advocated by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (Miles et al. 2013).

- **Stage 1 (data condensation)** involves transforming responses into thematic areas based on the key questions being addressed and highlighting illustrative quotations
- **Stage 2 (data display)** involves displaying the condensed data in a matrix with case details on one axis (stakeholder) and theme areas on the other
- **Stage 3 (conclusion drawing/verification)** involves identifying patterns, explanations and causal flows from the display matrix.

This iterative thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and issues and to establish differences/commonalities in opinions within and across the various stakeholders involved in the evaluation.

Findings from the qualitative and quantitative data streams were then triangulated to generate a synthesis of findings.

4. Evaluation approach and methods

4.5. Evaluability issues

A number of issues were identified that may impact on the results of the evaluation. These included:

- **Sensitivities related to the client group.** While the majority of IAA clients who had provided consent to be contacted for research purposes supplied an email address (324), a small number only provided telephone details (15). In the latter case, multiple attempts were made to contact clients but no messages were left so that clients' engagement with ICA was not disclosed on answering machines or voice mail
- **Out of date, incorrect or absent contact details** meant that certain clients listed in the IAA record system could not be contacted and were therefore excluded from participating in the evaluation. Of the 324 emails sent to IAA clients, 10 were returned as undeliverable
- **Survey respondent confusion.** It became apparent during the in-depth consultation with survey respondents that some were unable to differentiate between IAA and STCA services. Accordingly, responses provided may not always be related to IAA
- **Potential respondent bias.** Some individuals who contact IAA did not provide their name/contact details, and therefore, could not be invited to complete the survey. Those who consented to be contacted may differ from those who did not. This may introduce a potential respondent bias.
- **Recall bias.** ICA is a lengthy process. This introduces the risk of recall bias in the information provided in the survey and during in-depth consultations with clients, as respondents may find it difficult to remember or accurately recall details of events that happened in the past. Research studies indicate that 20% of critical details are irretrievable after one year and 50% after 5 years (Hassan n.d.). All studies that rely on self-reported data are prone to this limitation
- **Loss of corporate knowledge.** In a number of cases, key STCA or Commonwealth personnel involved in the initial implementation of IAA had left the organisation and this resulted in a loss of corporate knowledge, particularly in relation to the development and implementation phases. The richness and depth of the information provided may have been compromised as a result
- **Quality of DSS data provided.** Considerable variability existed in the quality and quantity of service-related data provided by DSS. The multiple modes of data capture currently in use made in-depth analysis of certain aspects of IAA functionality difficult.
- **Methodological constraints.** It had originally been proposed that focus groups would be convened with people attending some of the STCA information sessions. However, few information sessions were scheduled during the timeframes of the evaluation and, given the potential vulnerability of attendees, STCAs considered it inappropriate to attempt to convene focus groups. For these reasons, input from people recently engaged with the ICA process was limited to those who completed the online survey
- **Differences in how responses are articulated.** These differences may influence the interpretability of findings particularly as inclusion or exclusion of factors may relate to informants' narrative style rather than reflect true differences between stakeholders.

5. Implementation of IAA

5. Implementation of IAA

5.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the IAA service implementation to August 2016 date. Implementation is assessed in terms of the following items listed in the Intercountry Adoption Reform Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*).

- Achievements against the milestones/deliverables specified in Tranche 2
- Measures of success specific to the new support service.

Information for this section is derived from:

- Consultations with key internal DSS stakeholders:
 - Eight DSS staff who were part of the policy and implementation team during the planning, implementation and ongoing development of the IAA service were interviewed for this evaluation
 - Five social workers who operate the 1800 phone service provided input into this evaluation. Two of the social workers joined IAA in early 2016 while the remainder have been with the service since its inception
- Web analytic and IAA client data
- Consultations with targeted service users (survey and in-depth interviews)
- Consultations with external stakeholders including:
 - STCA representatives
 - Commonwealth agencies:
 - AGD
 - DFAT
 - DIBP
 - Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

The chapter concludes with a review of post-implementation service developments (*Section 5.4*).

5.2. Achievements against Reform Implementation Plan milestones and deliverables

Tranche 2 of the Reform Implementation Plan listed a series of milestones and deliverables specifically related to the new IAA service. These milestones and deliverables were structured under three distinct elements:

- The 1800 information line
- The IAA website
- Referral pathways from the IAA website.

Each of these elements is discussed in the following sections.

5. Implementation of IAA

5.2.1. 1800 information line

The Reform Implementation Plan milestones and deliverables (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*) applicable to the 1800 information line are listed in *Table 5-1*.

Table 5-1: Milestones/deliverables applicable to 1800 information line

Milestone/deliverable	Timeline
Develop infrastructure to support the information line, including a SharePoint site containing detailed information to respond to enquiries ('knowledge base') and data collection tools	Jan–Apr 2015
Develop protocols for the information line (e.g. complaints protocols, privacy and disclosure guidelines, retention strategy, business continuity plan)	Jan–Apr 2015
Develop operational guidelines for the information line, including hours of operation	Mar–Apr 2015
Develop a privacy approach for the information line, including a pre-recorded privacy message	Mar–Apr 2015
Recruit qualified social workers	Feb–Mar 2015
Develop a training package for the social workers	Mar–Apr 2015
Train qualified social workers in readiness for delivering the information line	Mar–Apr 2015
Develop scripts for social workers	Mar–Apr 2015
1800 information line operational	27 April 2015

Discussions with internal stakeholders indicated that all milestones/deliverables related to the 1800 information line were delivered within the specified timelines.

These milestones/deliverables were achieved despite the following challenges:

- **The IAA service being a new model of engagement for DSS.** As internal stakeholders repeatedly highlighted, *“delivering a service internally ...isn't our usual core business”*. Consequently, the service was established in an environment where no prior blueprint for delivering a direct client service existed
- **The restricted timeframes imposed.** The team was allocated only six months to establish the service. During this time, they successfully managed to:
 - Recruit and train staff
 - Establish the necessary infrastructure
 - Develop systems, operational guidelines, policies and response protocols.

Key finding:

- All milestones/deliverables related to the 1800 information line were successfully delivered

5. Implementation of IAA

5.2.2. IAA website

The Reform Implementation Plan milestones and deliverables (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*) applicable to the IAA website are listed in *Table 5-2*.

Table 5-2: Milestones/deliverables applicable to IAA website

Milestone/deliverable	Timeline
Engage external provider to develop website concept and structure, and undertake user testing	Feb-Mar 2015
Identify website links and develop/collate content for the website	Feb-Apr 2015
Finalise website concept and design based on user testing	Mar 2015
Develop protocols for the website (e.g. privacy and information and complaints protocols)	Mar-Apr 2015
Establish a website address	Apr 2015
Transfer content from AGD website to the new website	Mar-Apr 2015
Upload all content and links onto the website in readiness for launch	Apr 2015
Website operational	27 April 2015

Stakeholder consultations confirmed that the milestones and deliverables listed in *Table 5-2* were successfully implemented. Some timeframes were modified to accommodate delays in receiving agreement to commence operation.

The extensive input of the implementation team into the development of website content was recognised by all internal stakeholders:

“We had to take information in a very technical language and make it accessible to prospective adoptive parents and keep it sensitive for past adoptees”

“The implementation team had to pull together a lot of information from the AGD and STCAs in a very condensed timeframe”.

Key finding:

- All milestones/deliverables related to the IAA website were delivered.

5. Implementation of IAA

5.2.3. Referral Pathways from the IAA website

The Reform Implementation Plan milestones and deliverables (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*) applicable to the referral pathways are listed in *Table 5-3*.

Table 5-3: Milestones/deliverables applicable to referral pathways

Milestone/deliverable	Timeline
Conduct consultations with relevant Commonwealth and state and territory agencies about website content and information line referral pathways	Jan–Apr 2015
Receive content for the website and establish referral pathways for the information line with Commonwealth agencies, including AGD, DIBP, DFAT, DHS and NDIS	Mid-Apr 2015
State and territory government support to use links to their websites on the new website and establish referral pathways with them for the information line	Early Apr 2015
Receive website links and establish referral pathways for the information line with state and territory governments	Mid-Apr 2015
Approach relevant non-government service providers about providing and receiving referrals to and from the new service	Late Apr–Jun 2015

Consultations with internal stakeholders indicated that consultations were undertaken with Commonwealth agencies and STCAs regarding web content and this was subsequently received and included on the IAA website. The IAA website also provides links to each of the STCA websites as well as Australian Government supports including Department of Human Services, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Family and Relationships Services.

However, as outlined in *Table 3-3*, links to the IAA website were not provided by all STCAs. In some cases, those providing links misnamed the IAA service.

Lifeline was approached as an appropriate referral for those clients who were in crisis and may need additional support outside of IAA operating hours. Referrals have been made to Lifeline. Some service providers (e.g. Relationships Australia South Australia (RASA)) were also involved in the initial training of IAA staff.

Key primary service providers IAA engages with include organisations with specialist adoption expertise such as Post Adoption Services Queensland (PASQ), the NSW Post Adoption Resource Centre (PARC), RASA as well as the newly funded LifeWorks service (in partnership with ISS), and the separate ISS tracing/reunification service (*see Section 6.5.2*). Each of these services has strong local links to a range of other supports, which is a contract requirement for DSS-funded services. Referrals are also made to parent support groups and other Commonwealth/state agencies.

Key findings:

- All milestones/deliverables related to referral pathways from the IAA website were delivered
- While listed as a requirement in the Reform Implementation Plan, links to the IAA website were not provided by all STCAs. In some cases, those providing links misnamed the IAA service.

5.3. Achievements against measures of success

In the Reform Implementation Plan, fifteen measures of success are specified that directly or indirectly apply to the IAA service (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*). For the purposes of discussion, these measures have been categorised into the following four groups, as shown in *Table 5-4*:

- Service uptake
- Operational parameters
- Client satisfaction
- STCA feedback.

Achievements related to each of group of measures are discussed in the following sections.

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Table 5-4: Measures of success specified in Reform Implementation Plan

Measure	Key performance indicator	Category				
		Service uptake	Operational parameters	Client satisfaction	STCA feedback	Other stakeholder feedback
A1	More than 10 calls per month to the information line	✓				
A1	More than 50 visits per month to the website	✓				
A1	More than 50 email enquiries per month	✓				
A1	More than 80% of calls are answered by information line staff within 20 seconds		✓			
A1	More than 50% of clients who contact the information line receive at least one referral		✓			
A1	More than 80% of referrals to Commonwealth agencies are facilitated referrals		✓			
A1	Fewer than 2% of clients report receiving a wrong referral from the new service		✓			
A1	More than 80% of clients who agreed to be followed up received a call or email within 5 working days		✓			
A1	More than 80% of email enquiries are responded to within 5 working days		✓			
A1	More than 65% of people report the new service was useful, including reducing time spent finding relevant information			✓		

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Measure	Key performance indicator	Category				
		Service uptake	Operational parameters	Client satisfaction	STCA feedback	Other stakeholder feedback
A1	Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information provided Website Referral pathways by the information line 			✓		
A1	At least 250 people subscribe to the IAA mailing list in the first year of operation	✓				
A1	Fewer than 5% of calls or emails are complaints about the service			✓		
A1	Fewer than 10% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes			✓		
B1	STCAs report the service is improving people's understanding and expectations about ICA				✓	
B1	STCAs report an improvement in their experience of working with the Commonwealth government agencies				✓	
B1	The majority of people report feeling supported through their experience in the ICA process			✓		
B1	Family support service providers report they feel better equipped to help people during the ICA process					✓

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5.3.1. Service uptake

Service uptake was assessed using two main data sources:

- Google web analytics data related to the IAA website for the period 17 May 2015 to 30 June 2016
- IAA client data for the period 17 May 2015 to 31 May 2016.

It is important to note that while the Google web analytics data gives an overview of web page traffic:

- Web page traffic may not equate with usage
- A profile of website users in terms of their stage of adoption, demographics, and reasons(s) for accessing the site is not attainable from this data.

5.3.2. Service uptake by geographical region

The distribution of web analytics data by city is shown in *Table 5-5*. When this city- level data is aggregated by state, the three largest states account for the greatest proportion of web traffic - NSW 27.4%, Victoria 21% and QLD 15.7%

Table 5-5: Web analytics by city

Rank	City	Sessions	Percentage
1	Sydney (NSW)	38,701	27%
2	Melbourne (VIC)	30,749	21%
3	Brisbane (QLD)	21,713	15%
4	Perth (WA)	11,216	8%
5	Canberra (ACT)	8,752	6%
6	Adelaide (SA)	8,096	6%
7	Hobart (TAS)	1,140	0.8%
8	Gold Coast (QLD)	1,076	0.7%
9	Launceston (TAS)	779	0.5%
10	Newcastle (NSW)	649	0.4%
11	London (UK)	515	0.4%
12	Darwin (NT)	512	0.4%

An analysis of page-specific traffic suggests that the main reasons people accessed the IAA website were to obtain general information on ICA and information specific to country programs.

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Achievements in relation to the Reform Implementation Plan measures of success

As outlined in *Table 5-6*, the IAA service has exceeded all four service usage success measures specified in the Reform Implementation Plan (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*).

Table 5-6: Achievements related to service usage measures

Measure of success	Achievements
More than 10 calls per month to the information line	An average of 98 calls were handled by the information line per month in the period May 2015 to May 2016.
More than 50 visits per month to the website	Web analytics indicate that significantly more than 50 visits per month to the website. More refined visit details cannot be established from the available data
More than 50 email enquiries per month	An average of 63 email enquiries were received each month between May 2015 and May 2016.
At least 250 people subscribe to the IAA mailing list in the first year of operation	256 people subscribed to the IAA mailing list in the first year with only one person unsubscribing

Key findings:

- The highest levels of web traffic were evident for the three largest states (NSW 27.4%, Victoria 21% and QLD 15.7%)
- The IAA service exceeded all four service usage success measures specified in the Reform Implementation Plan.

5.3.3. Operational parameters

IAA's achievements against each of the four operational success measures (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*) are shown in *Table 5-7*.

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Table 5-7: Achievements related to operational success measures

Measure of success	Achievements
More than 80% of calls are answered by information line staff within 20 seconds	92.4% of calls were answered within 20 seconds between May 2015 and May 2016.
More than 50% of clients who contact the information line receive at least one referral	<p>Limitations in the current client data management system meant a full assessment of referral patterns could not be undertaken against this KPI. Of particular note is the convention of recording people who do not give identifying information or contact details as anonymous interactions not clients, thus making it impossible to track referral for interactions.</p> <p>The number of anonymous clients recorded in current IAA data systems makes it impossible to establish the total number of individual clients who contacted the service. Of the 1693 (apparent) individual clients who used the information line between May 2015 and May 2016, 906 (53.5%) received at least one referral.</p>
More than 80% of referrals to Commonwealth agencies are facilitated referrals	<p>IAA client data shows that 15% (38/249) of referrals to Commonwealth agencies between May 2015 and May 2016 were facilitated.</p> <p>The majority of un-facilitated referrals related to pre-adoption clients (164/211, 77.5%), many of whom were categorised as having enquiries related to international issues.</p> <p>Consultations with IAA staff and management indicated that clients generally prefer to have time to consider the information provided by the service and to discuss it with their partner before engaging with other Commonwealth agencies. Few are in a position to request, or are willing to accept a facilitated referral. Another factor that contributes to the low levels of facilitated referrals evident is that IAA cannot facilitate referrals to Commonwealth partners for out-of-scope ICA enquiries. Limitations in the data mean that the scale of 'out-of-scope' enquiries cannot be established as no specific category is provided to capture such enquiries.</p>

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Measure of success	Achievements
Fewer than 2% of clients report receiving a wrong referral from the new service	<p>Analysis of Sharepoint data for the period May 2015 to May 2016 indicates that a total of 1436 of 4,222 client interactions (34.0%) resulted in some form of referral. These referrals included referrals to STCAs and Commonwealth agencies (including websites) as well as to a range of government and non-government agencies.</p> <p>As IAA does not receive any reports from the agencies they refer and does not follow up with clients regarding the appropriateness of the referral provided, the service's performance relative to this measure cannot be determined. No data is captured.</p>
More than 80% of clients who agreed to be followed up received a call or email within 5 working days	Limitations in the current client management system meant that the 'request for follow up' column in the SharePoint data report is blank for the period May 2015 to May 2016. IAA staff deleted follow-up date details for completed clients.
More than 80% of email enquiries are responded to within 5 working days	Limitations in the current client management system meant that while multiple interactions were often recorded for each client, a follow-up date details are deleted for completed clients.

This review of performance relative to operational measures of success highlighted:

- The redundancy of several KPIs. These KPIs were developed prior to the service being implemented. The client interaction profile that emerged differed from that presupposed in the Reform Implementation Plan, thus limiting their utility in measuring IAA performance
- Limitations in the IAA client data system (Sharepoint). Blank fields and data entry protocols (e.g. multiple referrals listed in the same data field) coupled with certain data elements not being captured (e.g. client uptake and feedback of referrals) limited the extent to which some KPIs could be assessed. DSS is currently looking at how to better collect this data.
- Limitations in data sharing. IAA does not currently receive information on referral uptake from the agencies to which they refer clients. This limits the assessment of KPIs related to client referrals.

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Key findings:

- KPIs related to call answering times were exceeded
- KPIs related to facilitated referrals and follow-up were redundant because interaction patterns between IAA and clients differed substantially from what had been anticipated prior to service implementation, with few seeking facilitated referrals or follow up
- Sharepoint data did not facilitate a full assessment of email response times
- The absence of follow-up data on referral outcomes meant that KPIs related to wrong referrals could not be assessed

5.3.4. Client satisfaction

Client satisfaction was assessed using the following data sources:

- IAA client data
- Consultations with targeted service users via:
 - A national survey (n=230)
 - In-depth interviews with a subset of 25 survey respondents who had used the IAA service.

Further details of the survey respondents and interviewees are provided in *Appendix B*.

Each of the client satisfaction measures (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*) are discussed below.

Measure 1: More than 65% of people report the new service was useful, including reducing time spent finding relevant information

The usefulness of the new service was assessed using two main data sources:

- IAA client data (Sharepoint entries for the period 17 May 2015 to 31 May 2016)
- Survey responses.

Overall client satisfaction with the service was assessed using Sharepoint entries related to each client interaction. Client satisfaction with the action taken in each interaction is a mandatory field and one of three codes can be selected as outlined in the table below:

Code	Data entry guide
Yes	Select when the client responds in the affirmative that you have answered their enquiry and there is nothing more they need from this interaction at this time
No	Select if the client terminates the call before a resolution is reached, is observably displeased by the service provided, or seeks further information from you which cannot be provided

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Code	Data entry guide
Unsure	Select if you have not asked if the client is satisfied their enquiry has been answered and there is nothing more they need from this interaction at this time. Select once an e-mail has been sent to a client where you are unable to assess satisfaction.

Analysis of SharePoint entries for the period 17 May 2015 to 31 May 2016 indicates that a total of 3972 client interactions were recorded (Table 5-8). When n/a responses are excluded, 61.5% of all interactions were categorised as 'yes' (2214/3602) and only 1.6% (58/3602) were categorised as 'no' (Table 5-8). These figures suggest high levels of satisfaction with the service overall.

More than one-third (36.9%, 1330/3602) of all interactions were classified as 'unsure' for the period 17 May 2015 to 31 May 2016. Consultations with IAA service staff indicated that the 'unsure' code is often used in SharePoint prior to case closure because multiple support interactions are often required per client. Satisfaction assessment is not undertaken until the final interaction has been completed. This practice does not fully comply with the intended use of the 'unsure' data entry guide and thus poses limitations to the utility of the data collected as satisfaction with each support interaction is not recorded.

Table 5-8: Client satisfaction with the action taken in interaction with IAA

Client category	Sharepoint entry							
	Yes		No		Unsure		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Adoptee	54	2.2%	2	2.8%	37	2.6%	93	2.3%
Assessment finalised	5	0.2%	-	-	-	-	5	0.1%
Assessment pending	32	1.3%	1	1.4%	1	0.1%	34	0.9%
Awaiting allocation	39	1.6%	-	-	22	1.5%	61	1.5%
Matched and waiting	65	2.6%	-	-	38	2.6%	103	2.6%
Others affected by adoption	70	2.8%	-	-	37	2.6%	107	2.7%
Post-adoption in Australia	140	5.7%	5	7.0%	56	3.9%	201	5.1%
Pre-adoption	1809	73.4%	50	70.4%	1139	79.4%	2998	75.5%
Subtotal	2214	89.80%	58	81.60%	1330	92.70%	3602	90.70%
n/a ³	252	10.2%	13	18.3%	105	7.3%	370	9.3%
Total	2466	100.0%	71	100.0%	1435	100.0%	3972	100.0%

³The Sharepoint data user guide indicates that n/a should be selected 'when the client has not disclosed sufficient information to categorise their call, does not identify with any of the above categories, or is not an ICA client. This may include ICA relevant clients, such as expat, ad hoc, relative or known child adoptions'.

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In the survey, only 36 of the 220 parental respondents (16.4%) indicated they had used both the information line and IAA website, the majority of whom were considering ICA for the first time (26/36, 72.2%). Given the small number of dual users, service usefulness is assessed for the information line and website separately (see Measures 2a and 2b respectively).

All survey respondents (including adoptees and ineligible clients) were given an opportunity to list what they considered to be the main benefits of the IAA service. Of the 148 valid free text responses provided, the following key benefits were identified:

- The IAA service made it easy to access information which was reliable, timely and consistent (76/148, 51.4%)
- IAA was beneficial as an additional support (24/148, 16.2%)
- IAA was valued as an independent agency, providing respondents with someone to talk to other than their STCA (9/148, 6.1%).

Key findings:

- 61.5% of all IAA clients were categorised as having had their query resolved and only 1.8% were categorised as not being resolved. This surrogate measure suggests high levels of satisfaction with the service overall
- The absence of clear objective measures of client satisfaction limits the assessment of client satisfaction based on Sharepoint client data
- Survey respondents' perceptions of the usefulness of IAA was evident in the range of benefits listed, which included IAA providing:
 - Easy access to information
 - Additional support
 - An independent agency to talk with.

Measure 2a: Of all the people who accessed the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the information provided

In the survey, a total of 41 parental respondents indicated that they had used the IAA information line. Of these:

- 37 were wanting to adopt, either for the first time or as repeat adoptive parents
- Two were in the post adoption phase
- Two had considered adopting but had decided not to continue.

In addition to these parental respondents, two adult adoptees also responded to the information line usage questions. Responses for the latter are not included in *Table 5-9* and are discussed separately later in this section.

Overall, almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) indicated that they had used the 1800 information line (*Table 5-9*). Those wanting to adopt for the first time accounted for the greatest proportion of information line users (31/42, 73.8%).

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Table 5-9: Parental respondents' usage of IAA's information line

Information line usage	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Yes	31	28.7%	2	10.5%	7	9.6%	2	10.0%	42	19.1%
No	72	66.7%	17	89.5%	61	83.6%	16	80.0%	166	75.5%
Not stated	5	4.6%	0	0.0%	5	6.8%	2	10.0%	12	5.5%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	80.0%	220	100.0%

Half of the 42 respondents who reported having used the information line rated the information provided as either very useful or useful (21/42, 50.0%) (Table 5-10).

Table 5-10: Parental respondents' assessment of the usefulness of information provided by information line staff

Usefulness of information provided by information line staff	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Very useful	9	8.3%	-	-	1	1.4%	1	5.0%	11	5.0%
Useful	5	4.6%	-	-	3	4.1%	2	10.0%	10	4.5%
Subtotal	14	12.9%	-	-	4	5.5%	3	15.0%	21	9.5%
Neutral	7	6.5%	1	5.3%	1	1.4%	-	-	9	4.1%
Not very useful	4	3.7%	1	5.3%	2	2.7%	-	-	7	3.2%
Not at all useful	4	3.7%	-	-	1	1.4%	-	-	5	2.3%
Not stated/not applicable	79	73.1%	17	89.5%	65	89.0%	17	85.0%	178	80.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

When given the opportunity to comment on the satisfaction ratings provided, 28 respondents did so, some providing multiple comments. A total of 34 valid comments were provided. Of these, 11/34 (32.4%) said that the staff were friendly and easy to talk to, and 9/34 (26.5%) said their questions were answered. Of the comments rating the service as not useful or neutral, 9/34 (26.5%) said the service could not help them, and a further 5/34 (14.7%) said the role of the IAA was unclear or the staff were not able to help due to limitations related to IAA's scope of influence.

Adult adoptees

Two adult adoptees who responded to the survey indicated that they had used the Information line. However, their assessment of the usefulness of the information provided by IAA information line staff was polarised. One adoptee reported the information received as being very useful, citing the provision of counselling resources and links to a country-specific adoptee group to support this assessment. The other adoptee rated the information as being 'not at all useful' because it was unable to address the difficulties they were having in locating their birth family, something which was outside the scope of IAA.

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Key findings:

- Almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) indicated that they had used the 1800 information line
- Half (21/42, 50.0%) of those who had used the information line ranked the information provided as either very useful or useful
- Two adoptees responded to the survey and had used the information line during the evaluation period (accounting for 0.9% of all respondents). They were polarised on their assessment of the usefulness of the information provided.

Measure 2b: Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the website

In assessing client satisfaction with the IAA website, two elements of the website are considered:

- The website generally
- The online enquiry form.

General website usage

In the survey, a total of 131 parental respondents indicated that they had used the IAA website. Of these:

- 89 were wanting to adopt, either for the first time or as repeat adoptive parents
- 27 were in the post adoption phase
- 15 had considered adopting but had decided not to continue (*Table 5-11*).

Additionally, two adult adoptees also responded to the website usage questions. Responses for the latter are not included in *Table 5-11* and are discussed separately later in this section.

Overall, almost 60% of the total parental respondents (131/220) had used the IAA website (*Table 5-11*), Highest usage was evident among those wanting to adopt for the first time (81/131, 61.8%) and in the post-adoption phase (27/131, 20.6%).

Table 5-11: IAA website usage by parental respondents

IAA website usage	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	81	75.0%	8	42.1%	27	37.0%	15	75.0%	131	59.5%
No	24	22.2%	11	57.9%	42	57.5%	4	20.0%	81	36.8%
Not stated	3	2.8%	0	0.0%	4	5.5%	1	5.0%	8	3.6%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Overall, the website information was rated as very useful or useful by more than one-third of parental survey respondents (81/220, 36.8%) (*Table 5-12*). The proportion of respondents who ranked the

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website information as either 'very useful' or 'useful' increases to 61.8% (81/131) when only those who had used the website are considered (*Table 6 9*).

Table 5-12: Parental respondent's assessment of the usefulness of website information

Usefulness of information provided on website	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very useful	12	11.1%	1	5.3%	2	2.7%	1	5.0%	16	7.3%
Useful	46	42.6%	1	5.3%	9	12.3%	9	45.0%	65	29.5%
Subtotal	58	53.7%	2	10.6	11	15.0%	10	50.0%	81	36.8%
Neutral	10	9.3%	3	15.8%	9	12.3%	5	25.0%	27	12.3%
Not very useful	7	6.5%	1	5.3%	4	5.5%	-	-	12	5.5%
Not at all useful	5	4.6%	2	10.5%	2	2.7%	-	-	9	4.1%
Not stated/ not applicable	28	25.9%	11	57.9%	47	64.4%	5	25.0%	91	41.36%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Adult adoptees

Two adult adoptees who completed the survey indicated that they had used the IAA website. In both cases, the respondents were seeking information on post-adoption services. Again, both respondents were polarised in their assessment of the usefulness of the web information provided, with responses ranging from 'very useful' to 'not at all useful'.

Use of the online enquiry form

A total of 65 of the 220 parental respondents (29.5%) indicated that they had used the online enquiry form (*Table 5-13*). Of those who had used the form, those wanting to adopt for the first time represented the highest online enquiry form usage group (47/65, 72.3%).

Table 5-13: Usage of online contact form

Use of online contact form	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	47	43.5%	3	15.8%	7	9.6%	8	40.0%	65	29.5%
No	33	30.6%	5	26.3%	19	26.0%	7	35.0%	64	29.1%
Not stated	28	25.9%	11	57.9%	47	64.4%	5	25.0%	91	41.4%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Those who had used the online contact form reported high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness (44/65, 67.7%) and the usefulness (36/65, 55.4%) of the response they received (*Table 5-14* and *Table 5-15* respectively).

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Table 5-14: How satisfied were you with the timeliness of the response you received to the online contact form?

Timeliness of response	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very satisfied	15	13.9%	1	5.3%	1	1.4%	-	-	17	7.7%
Satisfied	17	15.7%	1	5.3%	2	2.7%	7	3.5%	27	12.3%
Subtotal	32		2		3		7		44	20.0%
Neutral	5	4.6%	-	-	2	2.7%	1	5.0%	8	3.6%
Dissatisfied	5	4.6%	-	-	1	1.4%	-	-	6	2.7%
Very dissatisfied	4	3.7%	1	5.3%	1	1.4%	-	-	6	2.7%
Not stated/ not applicable	62	57.4	16	84.2%	66	90.4%	12	60.0%	156	70.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Table 5-15: How satisfied were you with the usefulness of the response you received to the online contact form?

Usefulness of response	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very satisfied	12	11.1%	-	-	1	1.4%	-	-	13	5.9%
Satisfied	15	13.9%	1	5.3%	-	-	7	35.0%	23	10.5%
Subtotal	27	25.0%	1	5.3%	1	1.4%	7	35.0%	36	16.4%
Neutral	11	10.2%	1	5.3%	2	2.7%	1	5.0%	15	6.8%
Dissatisfied	4	3.7%	-	-	2	2.7%	-	-	6	2.7%
Very dissatisfied	5	4.6%	1	5.3%	2	2.7%	-	-	8	3.6%
Not stated/ not applicable	61	56.5%	16	84.2%	66	90.4%	12	60%	155	70.5%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

When given the opportunity to comment on the usefulness of the advice they received about the intercountry adoption process in response to their enquiries made through the online contact form, 45 parental respondents provided a total of 48 free-text comments. Most (31/48, 64.6%) said that the service was helpful, that it answered their questions, that contact was timely or they were happy with the service they received. Those who expressed dissatisfaction with the advice provided did so because:

- Their question could not be satisfactorily answered, they received no new information or there were discrepancies in the information they had obtained (9/48, 18.8%)
- They were given no hope of adopting a child from overseas (3/48, 6.3%).

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Adult adoptees

Only one adult adoptee who completed the survey indicated that they had used the online contact form. They reported being very satisfied with the usefulness of the information provided and the timeliness of the response received.

Key findings:

- IAA website
 - Overall, almost 60% of the total parental respondents (131/220) had used the IAA website
 - 61.8% (81/131) of parental respondents who had used the website ranked the website information as very useful or useful
- Online contact form
 - 29.5% (65/220) of all parental respondents indicated that they had used the online enquiry form
 - Those who had used the online contact form reported high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness (44/65, 67.7%) and the usefulness (36/65, 55.4%) of the response they received.

Measure 2c: Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the referral pathways provided by the information line

As outlined in *Table 5-7*, one-third of client interactions (34.0%) with IAA resulted in some form of referral. However, the current client data system does not record client satisfaction with referrals and referral uptake or satisfaction information is not later provided by the organisation(s) to which the client is referred.

Survey responses showed that only 9.1% (20/220) of all parental respondents indicated that they had received a referral to their STCA and only 4.1% (9/220) to another service (*Section 6.2.2*). High levels of referral uptake were evident, with 12/20 (60.0%) of those who were referred to their STCA subsequently contacting their STCA, and 7/9 (77.8%) of those referred to another service subsequently contacting that service.

5. Implementation of IAA

Key finding:

- One-third of client interactions (34.0%) with IAA resulted in some form of referral (*Table 5-7*). However, information on client satisfaction with these referrals is not available from internal or external sources
- Survey responses showed that only 9.1% of all parental respondents indicated that they had received a referral to their STCA and only 4.1% to another service (*Section 6.2.2*). High levels of referral uptake were evident, with 12/20 (60.0%) of those who were referred to their STCA subsequently contacting their STCA and 7/9 (77.8%) of those referred to another service contacting that service.

Measure 3: Fewer than 5% of calls or emails are complaints about the service

IAA client data indicates that no complaints were received about the IAA service between May 2015 and May 2016.

Key findings:

- No complaints were received about the IAA service between May 2015 and May 2016

Measure 4: Fewer than 10% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes

IAA client data indicates that three calls/emails were received from one client which were complaints about the ICA processes (0.07% overall).

Key findings:

- Less than 1% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes

5.3.5. STCA feedback

Representatives from all eight STCAs provided input to the evaluation in June/July 2016.

Consultations with STCA representatives indicated that at jurisdictional level:

- STCA functions are located within different sections of the jurisdictional structure (*Section 3.3.3*)
- Responsibility for ICA ranged from individual staff members to small teams, depending on the size of the jurisdiction
- Duration in role of representatives who participated also differed, ranging from those who have been involved in ICA for over 10 years to those who were only two weeks into their role.
- Staff turnover at STCA level meant that, in some jurisdictions, staff involved in the initial implementation of IAA were no longer in these roles and were therefore unable to contribute to the evaluation.

These contextual differences impacted both the scale and depth of STCA responses as respondents had different levels of knowledge and understanding of IAA and its role.

5. Implementation of IAA

Findings associated with each of the two STCA-related measures are discussed in the following sections.

Measure B1a: STCAs report the service is improving people's understanding and expectations about ICA

Discussions with STCA representatives highlighted a lack of clarity at STCA and client level regarding the role of IAA in ICA. This perception may have been influenced by:

- A Commonwealth-state agreement that pre-dated the establishment of IAA and which did not document IAA's role or govern relationships between stakeholders. It should be noted that in April 2016, an agreement was made to review the Commonwealth-state agreement and thus develop a process to formalise IAA's role.
- Media coverage during the early implementation phase that generated unrealistic expectations of ICA processes.

Nonetheless, a number of STCA representatives acknowledged IAA's dual role in improving their understanding of ICA as well as the understanding of their clients:

"From a worker's point of view, we find it useful. We direct everyone who enquires to the website at the early stages. I think having all the program information in one central spot is very useful rather than every state and territory having their own version"

"It's great for me as there are so many countries to know all the criteria for"

"It's been supportive. It provides good information for my clients and for me. I'm quite happy with it"

"We now have one place they can send clients to regarding the Commonwealth's policy position".

Overall, those based in the smaller jurisdictions tended to express more positive assessments of the role and contribution of the IAA than their larger counterparts.

5. Implementation of IAA

Key findings:

- Discussions with STCA representatives highlighted a lack of clarity at STCA and client levels regarding the role of IAA in ICA. Possible reasons for this may include:
 - The absence of a Commonwealth-state agreement to document IAA’s role and govern relationships between stakeholders
 - Media coverage during the early implementation phase that generated unrealistic expectations of ICA processes
- A number of STCA representatives acknowledged IAA’s dual role in improving their understanding of ICA as well as the understanding of their clients
- Overall, those based in the smaller jurisdictions tended to express more positive assessments of the role and contribution of the IAA than their larger counterparts.

Measure B1b: STCAs report an improvement in their experience of working with the Commonwealth government agencies

During IAA’s early implementation phase, working relationships between IAA and STCAs were influenced by the lack of clarity regarding IAA’s role. STCAs were particularly concerned about service duplication, given that those interested in ICA would ultimately have to contact and process their application through their STCA. Some STCAs reported a lack of understanding/differentiation between IAA’s role and that of AGD, thus making transitioning from AGD to IAA as the central information/contact point problematic in some cases. As outlined in *Section 5.4*, IAA has since- invested a considerable amount of time in recent months in developing and improving working relationships with STCAs.

From a **Commonwealth agency perspective**, IAA was seen as instrumental in improving working relationships and in clarifying roles in the ICA process:

“The development of the IAA service has been a very positive one for us. It is really good that agencies can work collaboratively to improve the process for our clients. In speaking with our staff and staff from the other agencies as well, we all want the same thing and that is to serve the public better by providing a better service for our ICA parents... It was the first time that this number of federal agencies (AGD, DFAT, PM&C, DIBP, DSS) worked together collaboratively to provide seamless ongoing support for ICA clients. It was a very positive experience at the executive level”

“An unintended benefit is the service has sharpened our focus on our roles and how it translates through the various departments for ICA. It has helped us to clarify what is and what isn’t our role”

“Yes, absolutely the relationships have become smoother since IAA, I think IAA, DSS, AGD, Immigration, a team of us that are doing the best we can to expedite issues or provide guidance ASAP. IAA have been really helpful when it comes to the communiqué they’ve updated on their website re the changes to citizenship stuff”

“The more recent ICA stuff has been running smoothly since the inception of IAA and the mandate to work closer together”.

While the Central Authorities meeting was seen as a valuable means of communication between stakeholders, individual departments reported having additional meetings with IAA. It was also apparent that considerable engagement occurred between Commonwealth departments and STCAs,

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independent of the AGD-convened STCA meetings. Communication between IAA and the Commonwealth departments was described as being more frequent during the establishment phase.

Key findings:

- During IAA's early implementation phase, working relationships between IAA and STCAs may have been influenced by the lack of clarity regarding IAA's role:
 - STCAs were particularly concerned about service duplication
 - Some STCAs reported a lack of understanding/differentiation between IAA's role and that of AGD, thus making transitioning from AGD to IAA as the central information/contact point problematic in some cases
- From a Commonwealth agency perspective, IAA was seen as instrumental in improving working relationships and in clarifying roles in the ICA process

5.4. Post-implementation IAA service delivery developments

Since its initial implementation, the IAA has evolved beyond the original parameters specified in the Reform Implementation Plan (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*). As outlined in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, these developments have not only resulted in IAA exceeding some of its initial KPIs but also in several of these KPIs becoming redundant because of the client interaction patterns and client needs that emerged when the service was operationalised. Over time, this has resulted in a number of key actual and planned changes that are summarised in this section.

5.4.1. Developments to date

Developments to date have been categorised into three categories:

- Structural changes
- Expansion of client focus
- Stakeholder engagement.

Structural changes

When IAA was initially established, ICA processes within DSS spanned two distinct teams –service delivery and policy development. These teams have been restructured so that there is now one team which includes the IAA service and the policy function, the latter focussing on the department's policy interest in matters such as domestic adoption and permanency planning. This restructuring is expected to result in closer linkages between service delivery and policy.

Expansion of client focus

During the early stages of IAA operations, there was a general perception among external stakeholders that IAA was primarily focussed on serving the needs of prospective adoptive parents. This was a prevailing theme during consultations with all stakeholder groups. Feedback provided by targeted clients (survey and follow-up in-depth interviews, consultations with parent support and advocacy

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groups) indicated considerable gaps in the service provision in the early stages for adult adoptees, expatriate, relative and ad hoc adoptions, and post-adoption support. These latter groups were not part of IAA's initial remit.

During its first year of operation, IAA's client profile confirmed the complexity of service needs within the ICA community and the team actively sought to address these needs (see *Section 6.5.2* for further discussion).

New areas of emerging information needs have also been identified (e.g. surrogacy).

Face-to-face stakeholder engagement

To date, much of IAA's face-to-face engagement with STCAs has been through the quarterly Central Authorities meetings. During consultations with STCAs, this limited mode of face-to-face communication was seen as inadequate and not sufficient to resolve the lack of clarity about IAA's role discussed in earlier sections of this report.

In July and August 2016, IAA undertook service visits to the STCAs in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia. These visits were undertaken in conjunction with Lifeworks representatives and served as a means of:

- Building relationships between IAA and STCAs
- Clarifying the role of IAA
- Identifying opportunities for IAA to support STCA activities
- Promoting referral of clients to Lifeworks by STCAs (see *Section 6.5.2* for details of Lifeworks role).

IAA staff reported that these visits have been highly successful and have resulted in enhanced engagement with IAA by a number of STCAs. For example, NSW is now encouraging clients in the early enquiry stages of the ICA process to contact IAA, and more regular discussion opportunities between IAA and the NSW STCA are being explored.

Service visits were also used as an opportunity for IAA to engage with locally based non-STCA stakeholders. Examples included a visit to Jigsaw and the Benevolent Society in Queensland, meetings with adoptive parents and adult adoptees in South Australia, and meeting with the Adoption Research and Counselling Service (ARCS), a specialist adoption trauma counselling service in Western Australia.

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Key findings:

- Since its initial implementation, the IAA has evolved beyond the original parameters specified in the Reform Implementation Plan
- Developments to date have been categorised into three groups:
 - Structural changes - teams have been restructured so that there is now one team which includes the IAA service and the policy function
 - Expansion of client focus to include greater focus on all stages in the ICA process
 - Stakeholder engagement - In July and August 2016, IAA undertook service visits to the STCAs and local service providers to increase face-to-face engagement and clarify the role of IAA

5.4.2. In progress or planned changes

The following activities were reported to be currently underway:

- **Addressing specific stakeholder needs:**
 - Expatriate stakeholders. Consultations are currently underway between DSS and a working group comprised of STCAs, DIBP, AGD, DFACT and AIHW to obtain feedback on new information for the IAA website
 - Improved post-adoption support. DSS is considering options to improve the IAA's information on tracing and reunification, and post adoption support
- **Development of an online eligibility tool.** An interactive online eligibility tool is currently being developed to help people considering ICA navigate the myriad of options and information on the IAA website
- **Consideration of a new client record management system.** It is envisaged a new system could respond to changing information needs and enable more streamlined data entry, as well as avoiding duplication.

Key findings:

The following activities were reported to be currently underway:

- Addressing specific stakeholder needs including expatriate stakeholders and post-adoption support
- Development of an online eligibility tool
- Consideration of a new client record management system.

5.4.3. Key challenges (ongoing)

IAA reported a number of key on-going challenges in their delivery of services:

- **Size of the team.** The IAA team comprises 5.3 FTE staff working within the parameters of staffing the service from 9am to 5pm each work day. The small team size poses considerable challenges to:

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- Engaging in relationship building with the broad range of stakeholders involved in ICA, particularly face-to-face engagement, when key stakeholders are geographically spread around Australia
- Participating in key stakeholder events
- Sustaining the current level of engagement with or on behalf of clients. Staff expressed concern that as the service gets busier, their capacity to engage with clients for long periods of time by phone and to undertake the extent of follow up currently provided could be limited:

“Clients can have lengthy eligibility conversations with us”

“Time is a limitation, we’ve been lucky, we’ve always been allowed to follow up with people, take time to learn, research. We’ve never been given a time limit to wrap up a call or been told sorry you can’t help with that, it’s outside scope. Sometimes it’s a straight forward referral, but often might be out of scope but sometimes there might not be anyone else for them to talk to. We’ve always been able to approach supervisors to talk about how far we go. I haven’t felt restricted or told to stop helping someone or to wrap it up in timeframes. That’s been harder as we’ve gotten busier; we need to prioritise the clients”.

- **Adequacy of resources** (personnel and financial) for the ongoing development of the website and other online applications in DSS such as the eligibility tool listed above.
- **Meetings the diversity of client needs.** Staff highlighted three key elements in this regard:
 - **Level of advice that can be provided to service users.** Staff reported that some clients have the expectation that IAA can provide advice regarding policies that are under the remit of other Commonwealth departments. A key example in this regard is immigration and passport advice. While IAA can provide general guidance/information tailored to ICA adoption issues and provide facilitated referrals to Commonwealth departments for ICA-related clients, immigration advice can only be provided by agents authorised by the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA).

“The challenge for us is that we’re providing people advice on policy areas that sit in another agency, we’re regularly in communication with AGD and it’s hard because they’re not physically here.”

- **The diversity of client needs.** Staff deal with calls from clients at all stages of the intercountry adoption journey, many of whom are in an emotionally vulnerable state. This can result in personal and professional challenges for staff.

“One struggle is that adoption is such a difficult space... you never know if you’re going to get a really traumatised couple who want to adopt and thinking adoption is their last option, and you try to be sympathetic and help them through that, and bringing them back to the Hague, making sure it’s in the best interest of the child, or... you might have a really traumatised person from an adult adoptee who was traumatised by the journey of adoption and the life that has resulted from adoption. “

- **Maintaining a child-focus.** Staff reported that parental clients often focus on their needs as parents rather than those of the child. This can result in difficult conversations with clients.

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“You have to remember you’re an advocate for the child not for the person calling you. We see ourselves as here to uphold the convention, doing that sensitively is a daily challenge. It’s a struggle. As a social worker, you’re always working for the client but here above all else you’re working for the child.”

- **Data collection and management.** Current data collection by staff was described as “very convoluted”, involving a “myriad of recording systems”, each with their own purpose, that “don’t always talk well to each other”. Furthermore, as it had been originally developed with a focus on PAPs, its capacity to capture data related to the broader range of current clients was limited. This has resulted in double handling of information and recording inefficiencies. Staff developed Client Tracker, an additional electronic resource for recording client data that is not captured in Sharepoint (limitations of Sharepoint data were highlighted in *Table 5-7*).

As outlined earlier in *Section 5.3*, the current data collection and management system limited assessment of IAA activities against a number of the KPIs specified in the Reform Implementation Plan.

Key findings:

IAA reported a number of key on-going challenges in their delivery of services:




- **Team size.** The IAA team comprises 5.3 FTE staff. The small team size poses considerable challenges to:
 - Engaging in relationship building with the broad range of stakeholders involved in intercountry adoption
 - Participating in key stakeholder events
- **Meeting the time demands of engaging with clients.** Staff expressed concern that as the service is getting busier, their capacity to provide the current level service could be limited:
- **Limited resources** (personnel and financial) have been allocated to the ongoing development of the website and other online applications in DSS such as the eligibility tool listed above
- **Meeting the diversity of client needs** in terms of:
 - Level of advice that can be provided to service users particularly with regard to immigration and passport advice
 - The diversity of client needs across all stages of the intercountry adoption journey, many of whom are in an emotionally vulnerable state
 - Maintaining a child-focus when parental clients focus on their needs as parents rather than those of the child.
- **Data collection and management.** Current data collection in SharePoint is limited in its capacity to capture data related to the broader range of current clients. This has resulted in double handling of information and recording inefficiencies.









5. Implementation of IAA

5.4.4. Summary of key findings related to KPIs




Summary traffic light icons are used to indicate progress against measures of success and KPIs specified in the Reform Implementation Plan.

Traffic Light Key








-  Good progress made in this area, on track to achieve or has achieved desired outcome
-  Progress has been made towards achieving the desired outcome, but some aspects still require more work or further supporting information
-  There is currently insufficient evidence or data to indicate progress in this area

Measure of success	Progress	Commentary
More than 10 calls per month to the information line		KPI exceeded
More than 50 visits per month to the website		KPI exceeded
More than 50 email enquiries per month		KPI exceeded
More than 80% of calls are answered by information line staff within 20 seconds		KPI exceeded
More than 50% of clients who contact the information line receive at least one referral		Appears to have been achieved. However, client data does not enable a full assessment to be undertaken against this KPI.
More than 80% of referrals to Commonwealth agencies are facilitated referrals		KPI redundant as clients generally did not require a facilitated referral, instead preferring to take time to consider and discuss the information provided
Fewer than 2% of clients report receiving a wrong referral from the new service		As IAA does not receive any reports from the agencies they refer and does not follow up with clients regarding the appropriateness of the referral provided, the service's performance relative to this measure cannot be determined. No data is captured
More than 80% of clients who agreed to be followed up received a call or email within 5 working days		Data limitations mean that performance relative to this indicator cannot be determined from existing client data.

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Measure of success	Progress	Commentary
More than 80% of email enquiries are responded to within 5 working days		Data limitations mean that performance relative to this indicator cannot be determined from existing client data
More than 65% of people report the new service was useful, including reducing time spent finding relevant information		<p>Almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) indicated that they had used the 1800 information line. Half of those who had used the information line rated the information provided as either very useful or useful (21/42, 50.0%). 29.5% (65/220) of all parental respondents indicated that they had used the online enquiry form</p> <p>Those who had used the online contact form reported high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness (44/65, 67.7%) and the usefulness (36/65, 55.4%) of the response they received.</p>
Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the information provided		<p>Almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220) reported having used the 1800 information line. Just over half of those who had used the information line (21/42, 50.0%) rated the information provided as either very useful or useful.</p> <p>29.5% (65/220) of all parental respondents indicated that they had used the online enquiry form</p> <p>Those who had used the online contact form reported high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness (44/65, 67.7%) and the usefulness (36/65, 55.4%) of the response they received.</p>
Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the website		<p>Almost 60% (132/220) of parental respondents reported having used the website</p> <p>Those who had used the website ranked the website information as either 'very useful' or 'useful' (61.8%, 81/131)</p>
Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the referral pathways provided by the information line		<p>See <i>Chapter 6</i></p> <p>Data limitations mean that performance relative to this indicator cannot be determined from existing client data</p>

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Measure of success	Progress	Commentary
At least 250 people subscribe to the IAA mailing list in the first year of operation		KPI exceeded
Fewer than 5% of calls or emails are complaints about the service		No complaints were received about the IAA service between May 2015 and May 2016
Fewer than 10% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes		3 calls/emails were received from one client which were complaints about the ICA processes (0.07% overall)
STCAs report the service is improving people's understanding and expectations about ICA		At the commencement of the service, there was a lack of clarity at STCA and client levels regarding the role of IAA in ICA
STCAs report an improvement in their experience of working with the Commonwealth government agencies		During the early implementation phase, working relationships between IAA and STCAs were overshadowed by the lack of clarity regarding IAA's role and unrealistic expectations of ICA processes based on media coverage.
The majority of people report feeling supported through their experience in the ICA process		See <i>Chapter 6</i>
Family support service providers report they feel better equipped to help people during the ICA process		See <i>Chapter 6</i>

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

6.1. Introduction

As outlined in *Section 1.2*, this evaluation focussed on assessing IAA's progress related to the following four key intended outcomes:

- Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents have access to information and referral to support services
- Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents' experiences of the ICA process are positive
- Adoptive parents' experience of immigration and passport processes are improved
- The service informs ICA policies and practices.

Information for this section is derived from:

- Consultations with key internal DSS stakeholders:
 - Eight DSS staff who were part of the policy and implementation team during the planning, implementation and ongoing development of the IAA service were interviewed for this project
 - Five social workers who operate the 1800 phone service provided input into this evaluation. Two of the social workers joined IAA in early 2016 while the remainder have been with the service since its inception
- Web analytic and IAA client data
- Consultations with targeted service users (survey and in-depth interviews)
- Consultations with external stakeholder including:
 - STCA representatives
 - Commonwealth agencies:
 - AGD
 - DFAT
 - DIBP
 - PM&C
 - Parent support and advocacy groups
 - Academics.

Stakeholder perspectives in relation to each outcome are presented in the following sections.

6.2. Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents have access to information and referral to support services

For the purposes of discussion, achievements regarding access to information and referral to support services are discussed separately in the following sections.

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

6.2.1. Access to information

Four elements of access to information are considered in this section:

- Non-parental stakeholder assessment of the contribution of IAA to information access
- Uptake issues
- Comprehensiveness of the information provided
- Client expectations.

Non-parental stakeholder assessment of the contribution of IAA to information access

While IAA has undoubtedly made additional information available to those involved in ICA through its provision of its 1800 information line and website, non-parental stakeholders differed in their assessment of the contribution this information made to the ICA community.

Commonwealth stakeholders generally agreed that IAA has improved access to information for PAP, adoptive parents and other users, through its role as *“the front door of the [ICA] service.”* While the phone service was seen as particularly useful, the IAA service overall was not seen as a substitute for the STCAs.

“IAA has provided better access to information. It was definitely a different form of the service that was provided by AGD. However, in some situations, the states and territories are still the best places to get information from rather than an additional service”

“[Most PAPs] continue to receive most of their information about the adoption process from their state/territory adoption authority. That said, I think IAA is performing a necessary service. There are many government actors in the ICA process and it is important to have a single starting point/set of advice/referral service for DFAT, DIBP, AGD, DSS and the state/territory governments to refer to when working with PAPs.”

Any duplication of information provision to service users by IAA and the Commonwealth agencies/STCAs was not seen to be problematic because: *“people don’t necessarily believe the advice when they’re given”*. The challenging nature of ICA meant there was a need for service users to triangulate and confirm advice/information from multiple sources.

STCA representatives expressed mixed views regarding whether the IAA had improved access to information and referrals for its clients.

For some, the IAA website was seen as important precursor to STCA contact and provided clients with information in a more user-friendly format than had previously been available:

“Some people really explore and get a lot of questions from the website then come to me. Other people check eligibility through it. It’s a good source of info... I’m getting the feeling now that the current website is friendly and easier to use than the AGD website.”

While others acknowledged that IAA was providing access to information, some queried the value-add of this information because of

- Pre-existing information sources:

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

“They’re providing access to information, but whether or not people didn’t have access to that info before, that’s the question. Has it filled a need that was lacking? It’s a nice clear website, maybe if it was just their website and not AGD as well but that’s confusing as well because there is some info on IAA and some on AGD. It all just used to be one. In general terms they’re providing info, I think that was being provided well already before.

- The role of STCAs in the ICA process:

“We are the one stop shop. Everyone knows where to come because there isn’t heaps of different players. I don’t understand how IAA will benefit PAPs or anyone else. States are responsible and do everything already. I feel that IAA is redundant. IAA creates another step for PAPs. They are always referred back to the STCA anyway. I don’t understand IAA’s role”

“Having a website is great. I’m not sure about the phone line being of any benefit other than to refer to the states...People still have questions after they have gone to the IAA website and spoken with someone there”.

It is important to note that although IAA’s role in information provision was seen by some as duplication, not all STCA representatives viewed this duplication as negative because of the complex nature of ICA processes:

“The provision of information is a duplication but I don’t think that’s negative, people need to hear the information as many times as possible to sink in.”

“It’s a very emotional topic so sometimes people don’t hear things, so the more of the same message people get then the better”

“In my experience, a lot of ICA applicants you need to tell them a few times for the message to get through. They might have spoken to IAA but it’s like they’re not hearing everything and taking it on board”.

Academic informants supported the provision of a centralised source of information that is government-operated, particularly as PAPs otherwise tend to rely on support groups as their primary source of information.

“There can never be enough information. Having a central point for [ICA] info is good. There is info on the AGD website as well, but the more the Government can distribute accurate info, the better”.

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

Key findings:

- Non-parental stakeholders differed in their assessment of the contribution this information made to the ICA community:
 - *Commonwealth stakeholders:*
 - Generally agreed that IAA has improved access to information
 - Considered the information line service as particularly useful, noting that the IAA service overall was not seen as a substitute for the STCAs
 - *At STCA level:*
 - The IAA website was seen as important precursor to STCA contact and provided clients with information in a more user-friendly format than had previously been available
 - Some queried the value-add of this information because it was also available on the AGD website
 - *Academics welcomed the provision of a centralised information service*
- Any duplication of information provision to service users by IAA and the Commonwealth agencies/STCAs was not seen to be problematic. Non-parental stakeholders reported that the complex nature of ICA processes meant service users triangulate and confirm advice/information from multiple sources.

Uptake issues

As outlined earlier, only 19.1% (42/220) of all survey respondents reported having used the 1800 information line (Table 5-9). While usage of the website was higher, nonetheless more than a third of all respondents (36.8%, 81/220) reported not having used the website (Table 5-11). In each case, respondents were asked to indicate the main reason they had not used the service.

The two main reasons cited by non-users for not having used the IAA 1800 information line were that respondents did not know about the service (63/166, 38.0%) or that they had contacted their STCA directly (47/166, 28.31%) (Table 6-1).

Table 6-1: Reason why respondent did not use 1800 information line

Reason for not using 1800 information line	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I contacted my STCA directly	23	21.3%	7	36.8%	13	17.8%	4	20.0%	47	21.4%
The service did not exist when I started/went through the process	6	5.6%	1	5.3%	20	27.4%	4	20.0%	31	14.1%
I didn't know about it	32	29.6%	6	31.6%	20	27.4%	5	25.0%	63	28.6%

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

Reason for not using 1800 information line	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Other	9	8.3%	3	15.8%	8	11.0%	3	15.0%	23	10.5%
Not stated/not applicable	38	35.2%	2	10.5%	12	16.4%	4	20.0%	56	25.5%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Likewise, the service not having existed when the respondent had started the process (35/81, 43.2%) and that respondents did not know about the service (32/81, 39.5%) were the two main reasons reported by non-users for not having used the IAA website (Table 6-2).

Table 6-2: Reasons for not using the website

Reason	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I contacted my STCA directly	1	0.9%	4	21.1%	4	5.5%	-	-	9	4.1%
I did not know about it	16	14.8%	3	15.8%	12	16.4%	1	5.0%	32	14.5%
The service did not exist when I started the process	6	5.6%	3	15.8%	23	31.5%	3	15.0%	35	15.9%
Other	1	0.9%	1	5.3%	3	4.1%	-	-	5	2.3%
Not stated/not applicable	84	77.8%	8	42.1%	31	42.5%	16	80.0%	139	63.2%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

For those who had used the website, web browsing was the most frequently cited means through which respondents had first heard about the website (DSS paid Google to put the IAA website as the top search when the term 'intercountry adoption' was searched) (69/131, 52.7%) (Table 6-3). This was particularly the case where for those wanting to adopt through ICA for the first time (50/69, 72.5%). The website was also cited as the primary source of information about the 1800 information line (31.4%).

Table 6-3: How respondents first heard about the IAA website

Source	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
By browsing the web	50	46.3%	2	10.5%	6	8.2%	11	55.0%	69	31.4%
By word of mouth	4	3.7%	-	-	3	4.1%	1	5.0%	8	3.6%

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Source	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Through a parent support/ adoption group	5	4.6%	2	10.5%	10	13.7%	-	-	17	7.7%
Through my church	1	0.9%	1	5.3%		0.0%	-	-	2	0.9%
Through my STCA authority)	8	7.4%	-	-	4	5.5%	-	-	12	5.5%
Through the IAA 1800 number	2	1.9%	3	15.8%	1	1.4%	3	15.0%	9	4.1%
Through the media (e.g. newspapers, magazines)	8	7.4%	-	-		0.0%	-	-	8	3.6%
Other	3	2.8%	-	-	2	2.7%	-	-	5	2.3%
Not stated/not applicable	27	25.0%	11	57.9%	47	64.4%	5	25.0%	90	40.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Looking for general information about overseas adoption and for information about eligibility ranked as the two most frequently cited reason for using the website by parental respondents (59/131, 45.0% and 52/131, 39.7% respectively) (Table 6-4).

Table 6-4: Reasons for using the website

Reason	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Looking for general information on my eligibility to adopt	35	32.4%	4	21.1%	5	6.8%	8	40.0%	52	23.6%
Looking for general information on overseas adoption	42	38.9%	2	10.5%	8	11.0%	7	35.0%	59	26.8%
Seeking help on immigration processes		0.0%	1	5.3%	2	2.7%	-	-	3	1.4%
Seeking information on post-adoption services	1	0.9%	-	-	7	9.6%	-	-	8	3.6%
Other	3	2.8%	1	5.3%	4	5.5%	-	-	8	3.6%
Not stated/not applicable	27	25.0%	11	57.9%	47	64.4%	5	25.0%	90	40.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

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All survey respondents and non- service users who participated in in-depth follow-up interviews were asked their opinions on the main barriers to people accessing the IAA service. Not knowing the service is available or what the service does ranked as the most commonly cited barrier.

Although parent support and advocacy groups were not a primary source of information about IAA for survey respondents, their role in promoting IAA to their membership may be compromised by their understanding of the IAA's target clientele. Two of the four groups consulted were of the opinion that the IAA service was exclusively for those considering ICA while the other three groups were aware that the IAA has expanded its scope to also support parents of adopted children and adoptees.

Key findings:

- Underutilisation of the 1800 information line was evident with 75.5% (166/220) of survey respondents indicating they had not used the 1800 information line
- The two main reasons cited by non-users for not having used the IAA 1800 information line were that respondents did not know about the service (63/166, 38.0%) or that they had contacted their STCA directly (47/166, 28.31%)
- The two main reasons for not having used the IAA website were that the service did not exist when the respondent had started the process (35/81, 43.2%) or that respondents did not know about the service (32/81, 39.5%).

Comprehensiveness of the information provided

Consultations with **internal (DSS) and external stakeholders** (parents, adoptees, advocacy/parent groups, Commonwealth agencies and STCAs) highlighted that IAA primarily focussed on the information needs of prospective adoptive parents during the service's initial implementation phase. This focus was seen by many of the external stakeholders to limit the comprehensiveness of the information provided. In particular, gaps were identified in relation to adult adoptees, expatriate adoptions and ad hoc adoptions.

As outlined in *Section 5.4*, the IAA team identified the need to broaden its initial scope and has proactively sought to address the identified gaps.

Parental respondents were asked about the consistency of information between their STCA and the IAA service. While only 14 responses were received, 10/14 respondents (71.4%) ranked the information they received as being consistent or very consistent. When asked to comment on their answers about inter-service consistency, the following comments were provided:

“Very frustrating actually - I had done my research on eligibility etc. on a specific country... They (the state office) then came back to me saying they never recommend single people for that program, despite the IAA site saying single people are eligible... Very disappointing.”

Parent support and advocacy groups highlighted the importance of web information being accurate and comprehensive. Some expressed concerns about inaccuracies regarding program partners. *“The website would say South Africa is a program. It's not. One of our people got fully assessed for that and when they went to put their file over they couldn't because we [Australia] have no program in South Africa.”* This observation was also supported in consultations with STCAs where issues related to early

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website content were raised. *“I think in the beginning when they were transferring some information from AGD to IAA some of the wording was misleading and raising expectations”.*

For academic informants, a key consideration was the need for IAA to recognise that the information needs of ICA stakeholders differ considerably depending on their stage in the process. For this reason, information needs to be provided across the spectrum, from those beginning the process to those in the post-adoption stage, including adult adoptees

“Adoptive parents need the opportunity to get ongoing support because adoption is a lifelong process. You don’t just get a happy child and it’s happily ever after, issues keep arising.”

Key findings:

- IAA’s primary focus on the information needs of prospective adoptive parents during the service’s initial implementation phase was seen by many of the external stakeholders to limit the comprehensiveness of the information provided. In particular, gaps were identified in relation to adult adoptees, expatriate adoptions and ad hoc adoptions
- Parent support and advocacy group highlighted the importance of web information being accurate and comprehensive
- For academic informants, a key consideration was the need for IAA to recognise that the information needs of ICA stakeholders differ considerably depending on their stage in the process.

Client expectations

Stakeholders indicated that client assessment of the utility of available information was informed by their expectations. IAA team members also recognised this, noting that many clients enquire about complex international issues such as how to adopt a relative child residing overseas in a non-Hague Convention country. IAA tries to help clients understand the complexities of their situation but clients are often unreceptive to hearing the difficult messages being delivered:

“People expect us to be able to answer complex immigration enquiries. We’re not immigration lawyers so we’re not able to answer them. There’s an expectation from people that we should be able to navigate through that [immigration] as well which isn’t possible”

“Eligibility is like a puzzle with constantly moving pieces. Its very time consuming, we can give them the message we know the CA like them to have about the realities, the special needs, reinforcing the Hague process. We can do all of that. It doesn’t hurt for people to get those messages again and again. It’s not for everybody, they need to meet the criteria and be suitable and really ready to take on a child who’s probably going to have a range of special needs”

“Managing expectations, around immigration, people outside the formal path, people look for adoption as solving migration issues, and we can’t give people what they want”.

Key finding:

- Stakeholders indicated that client assessment of the utility of available information was informed by their expectations, some of which were unrealistic.

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6.2.2. Access to referrals

As outlined in *Table 5-7*, one-third of client interactions (34.0%) with IAA that were recorded in Sharepoint resulted in some form of referral.

Similar referral levels were not reflected in the survey responses, with only 9.1% (20/220) of all parental respondents indicating that they had received a referral to their STCA (*Table 6-5*) and only 4.1% (9/220) to another service (*Table 6-6*). This is despite almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) having indicated that they had used the 1800 information line (*Table 5-9*) and almost 60% of all parental respondents (131/220, 59.5%) having indicated they used the website (*Table 5-11*).

However, high levels of referral uptake were evident, with 12/20 (60.0%) of those who were referred to their STCA subsequently contacting their STCA (*Table 6-7*) and 7/9 (77.7%) of those referred to another service contacting that service (*Table 6-8*).

Table 6-5: Referral of parental respondents to STCA by IAA

Referred to STCA by IAA	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		N	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Yes	19	17.6%	-	-	1	1.4%	-	-	20	9.1%
No	11	10.2%	2	10.5%	7	9.6%	3	15.0%	23	10.5%
Not stated/not applicable	78	72.2%	17	89.5%	65	89.0%	17	85.0%	177	80.5%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Table 6-6: Referral of respondents to other services by IAA

Referred to other services by IAA	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		N	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Yes	8	7.4%	1	5.3%	-	-	-	-	9	4.1%
No	22	20.4%	1	5.3%	7	9.6%	3	15%	33	15.0%
Not stated/not applicable	78	72.2%	17	89.5%	66	90.4%	17	85%	178	80.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Table 6-7: Respondent uptake of referral to STCA

Contacted STCA after referral	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		N	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Yes	11	10.2%	-	-	1	1.4%	-	-	12	5.5%
No	8	7.4%	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	3.6%

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Contacted STCA after referral	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%
Not stated/not applicable	89	82.4%	19	100%	72	98.6%	20	100%	200	90.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Table 6-8: Respondent uptake of referral to other service

Contacted service referred to	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	7	6.5%	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	3.2%
No	1	0.9%	1	5.3%	-	-	-	-	2	0.9%
Not stated/not applicable	100	92.6%	18	94.7%	73	100%	20	100%	211	95.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

STCAs reported that referrals between STCAs and IAA were rarely two-way (in some cases, non-existent) and limited in scope. While some STCAs referred their clients to the IAA website, few referred to the information line service. The main rationale for this limited referral process was the view that STCAs were better equipped to deal with enquiries than their IAA counterparts and that clients would ultimately be referred back to their appropriate jurisdiction to clarify STCA-specific issues.

“We refer people to IAA to look at the programs to check eligibility that they would be interested in applying to adopt from. Occasionally IAA refer people to us but very rarely do they get put through directly or an email asking us to follow people up”

“We’ve never had a client referred. We don’t know if they’ve gone through IAA. We’ve never had a warm referral. We might refer people to the country program on the website but never refer to the phone line”

“We find that we have the capacity ourselves to engage with the couples. We find that if people go to IAA they are referred back to us anyway, because we need to have the conversation with those people and we need to make the decisions about suitability.”

Nonetheless, one STCA reported an increase in ICA interest in the past year “which could be because people are looking at the [IAA] website”.

It should be noted however, that all STCAs reported that they did not collect data on how their clients heard about their service or if they had prior engagement with any element of the IAA service so the true level of referral is unknown.

Parent support and advocacy groups who had used the service agreed that the IAA service has streamlined the referral process for them and their members. This has been achieved primarily through IAA acting as a conduit to the AGD and DIBP. Prior to the implementation of the IAA service, the

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advocacy and support groups had to refer to multiple government organisations and the specific support groups to get the information they required.

Key findings:

- Similar referral levels were not reflected in the survey responses, with only 9.1% (20/220) of all parental respondents indicating that they had received a referral to their STCA (*Table 6-5*) and only 4.1% (9/220) to another service (*Table 6-6*). This is despite almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) having indicated that they had used the 1800 information line (*Table 5-9*) and almost 60% of all parental respondents (131/220, 59.5%) having indicated they used the website (*Table 5-11*).
- High levels of referral uptake were evident, with 12/20 (60.0%) of those who were referred to their STCA subsequently contacting their STCA and 7/9 (77.7%) of those referred to another service contacting that service
- While some STCAs referred their clients to the IAA website, few referred to the 1800 information line
- STCAs reported that they did not collect data on how their clients heard about their service or if they had prior engagement with any element of the IAA service so the true level of referral is unknown
- Parent support and advocacy groups who had used the service agreed that the IAA service has streamlined the referral process for them and their members, primarily through IAA acting as a conduit to the AGD and DIBP.

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6.3. Prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents' experiences of the ICA process are positive

In the survey, parental stakeholders were generally of the view that IAA had contributed little to improving their experiences of adopting a child from overseas (Table 6-9), with 67.8% indicating either a neutral, 'not much' or 'not at all' response. Only 12.3% reported that their experience had improved as a result of IAA. This is despite 131/220 respondents (59.5%) have having reported using the website (Table 5-11) and 42/220 respondents (19.1%) reporting having used the 1800 information line (Table 5-9).

This low ranking may be attributable to the fact that more than half of all parental survey respondents (51.3%) commenced engagement with the ICA process prior to the establishment of IAA and a further 21.3% did not provide date details (Appendix C).

Table 6-9: Extent IAA improved respondents' experience of adopting a child from overseas

Extent improved	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Very much	5	4.6%	1	1.4%	-	-	-	-	6	2.7%
Some what	15	13.9%	4	5.5%	1	5.3%	1	5%	21	9.5%
Subtotal	20	18.5%	5	6.9%	1	5.3%	1	5.0%	27	12.3%
Neutral	32	29.6%	14	19.2%	4	21.1%	8	40%	58	26.4%
Not much	12	11.1%	3	4.1%	1	5.3%	2	10%	18	8.2%
Not at all	26	24.1%	33	45.2%	11	57.9%	3	15%	73	33.2%
Not stated/not applicable	18	16.7%	18	24.7%	2	10.5%	6	30%	44	20.0%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Commonwealth stakeholders' view on IAA's capacity to make ICA experiences more positive were mixed. Service provision by skilled social workers was seen to be advantageous, in two ways, because of the complex nature of the ICA process:

- They have the ability to deal with clients in a challenging state:

"IAA is better at delivering the bad news"

"We can be as sensitive as we can but no one wants to hear what we have to say, doesn't matter which way we explain it".

- IAA represents a neutral/independent source of information and advice for prospective adoptive parents without compromising confidentiality. This allows clients to more freely express their concerns:

"People don't like to tell us that they're depressed ...they think I might take their child away".

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A number of **STCAs** spoke to the fundamental difficulty in defining a positive experience of ICA and questioned the viability of assessing IAA's contribution to positive ICA processes because of the emotionally-fraught nature of ICA itself:

"For most people, it's [ICA] not going to be a positive process by virtue of the fact that they may not be eligible. From our perspective, it's important to be honest from the first phone call and not in a horrible way, give them the info that they need... which probably isn't peoples' idea of a positive experience. It's hard to say what a positive experience of ICA is".

Some STCAs acknowledged the potential of IAA to assist parents with navigating the complex system of ICA, which could in turn contribute to a more positive experience of IAA than was possible prior to the service's inception:

"I think the issue is that at the end of the day the IAA staff might give people some help about things like eligibility which might be helpful but in terms of how to navigate and get to know the service of the state, then the couple gets that through the state office. It's like chipping away, there is no one conversation... People only hear what they want to hear, people can get very grumpy, it's up to a country whether they want their children adopted, it's up to Australia to decide if the project should be developed and run in a way that everyone agrees is the right way. People don't understand there aren't that many children that need adoption. There are other ways to care for a child rather than sending a child for adoption overseas".

The **advocacy and support group** representatives reported knowledge of the IAA service from both personal experience and consistent positive feedback from members. They were particularly appreciative of the social workers involved in the 1800 information line because of their capacity to:

- Refer people to psychologists who specialise in adoption, especially in jurisdictions where such psychologists were difficult to access
- *"Deal with issues in a sensitive manner"*
- One group said *"We can't speak highly enough of the IAA service"*.

The three groups who had used the IAA service agreed that it has improved the experience of ICA in the following ways:

- The access to social workers was seen as a key positive development: Their empathetic approach means, *"They genuinely want to help minimise any stress for the callers"*
- The IAA's role as an independent agency was seen as very important.

"It's nice to know you can talk to the IAA if you want to as an avenue for dealing with the state department, so I think this federal hotline has achieved its aim. If you have problems with the CA at least you have somewhere else to go and voice it."

Academic informants considered it *"highly positive that the people employed by the IAA service are social workers"*, citing this as one of the key mechanisms for making the ICA process more positive. They also pointed out that: *"Most PAPs feel that they have to be perfect and always in control"*. Consequently, fear of jeopardising their application with the STCAs may make clients reluctant to seek help or talk about the negative aspects of the journey. IAA's independence from the process was seen as an important contributor to reducing parental stress and improving their experiences of ICA.

The consensus **within IAA** service was that the service has made it easier for people considering adoption and adoptive parents to access information; a view that was supported by feedback from

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clients that *“it’s good that all the information is in one spot with links to all relevant people in the ICA space”*.

Additionally, the service’s capacity to refer clients was seen by IAA staff as a further key benefit of the service.

“I think the greatest success is the way we work with the callers. We’re able to connect them to the right people, able to engage with them if there are emotional issues as we’re social workers, and to provide a neutral place... We can listen to what they say then move them to the right people. We can’t advocate but we can talk to the states to see what needs to happen, and see how we can work best with the client.”

From the IAA staff perspective, the stakeholders that were seen to benefit most from IAA’s role as a central point were those interested in expatriate adoptions.

“Before IAA existed there was never a central point for someone thinking about the pros and cons of expatriate adoption could go to for information and advice. For me, that’s a critical one because we know that’s [expatriate adoptions] a widely used pathway.... There are significant risks associated with this and the staff are now informed about the risks of that pathway - there is no screening of PAPs... people are potentially dealing with trafficking. “

Four key characteristics of the IAA service were listed by IAA stakeholders to support their view that IAA had improved clients’ experience of ICA:

- Capacity to manage client expectations. *“Managing expectations is the underlying issue. Whoever you’re speaking to, grief and loss is always the undercurrent, always part of what brings people to contact us.”*
- Capacity to provide a non-time-limited therapeutic response:
“A lot of those people want to go into detail about the struggle and the CAs are very stretched anyway. It’s good to have somewhere else to send those people to have a chance to have that conversation that they need to have - they might not get that time and space in stretched services that are there for a really specific purpose.”
“Because we all come from health professional backgrounds we try and assist people to the best of our ability, if that means spending an hour discussing their fertility issues and the grief associated with that, on a professional level that has been really important to offer”.
- IAA’s neutrality in the ICA process. *“We’re a pretty safe ear to vent on, or people come to us to try and get a different answer as well.”*
- Capacity to assist clients through the complexities of ICA processes. *“IAA provides a really important service to assist in better coordination for people going through the formal process.”*

Anecdotal evidence was also cited from informal client feedback. *“99% of people I speak with tell me how helpful it’s been.” “No one has cared like you do.”*

All stakeholders highlighted the emotive nature of ICA and the stress incurred by the long timeframes associated with the process, both of which impact on clients’ experiences of ICA. The fact that the key sources of potentially negative experience are related to the application process, led some stakeholders

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to question the extent to which IAA could practically influence services users' experience of the ICA process:

"Some people might feel more supported now that there is a caring ear but ...IAA can't help speeding up files and they can't open a new program" (Commonwealth stakeholder)

"It's a very challenging space for IAA to do a lot more than provide information because DSS has no control over any of the states and territories, so it's very difficult, in some ways their hands are tied in what support they can actually provide apart from information" (STCA)

"I don't know if IAA has benefited PAPs. I find that people know it's there and probably look at the website and we encourage them to, but because we deliver the service and they have easy access to talk to us and need to be referred back to us anyway I'm not sure how much it has benefitted PAPs as they could contact us anyway...at the end of the day they need to go to the state department anyway" (STCA).

Some stakeholders reported that the IAA service has added another unnecessary layer and barrier to ICA.

Key findings:

- In the survey, only 12.2% parental stakeholders reported that their experience had improved as a result of IAA. This is despite 131/220 respondents (59.5%) have having reported using the website and 42/220 respondents (19.1%) reporting having used the 1800 information line. This low ranking may be attributable to the fact that more than half of all parental respondents (51.3%) commenced engagement with the ICA process prior to the establishment of IAA and a further 21.3% did not provide date details
- All other non-parental stakeholders highlighted the complex nature of ICA and the stress incurred by the long timeframes associated with the process, both of which impact on clients' experiences of ICA
- IAA's capacity to practically influence services users' experience of the application process at STCA or partner country level, which is a key source of negative experience for parents, was seen as limited
- Key aspects of the IAA's role that were seen to improve parents' experiences were:
 - The therapeutic, empathetic and supportive role of IAA social workers
 - IAA's role as an independent agency.

6.4. Are adoptive parents' experiences of immigration and passport processes improved?

From the **IAA service's perspective**, their role as a conduit between clients and immigration and passport processes was seen as the key means whereby clients' experiences had been improved in this area. IAA works closely with the Adoption Liaison Team in DIBP and provides warm referrals to other agencies as required. *"It's good for them [clients] to be able to call us and have us give them a warm referral. We've been able to speak to agencies on their behalf".* IAA cannot however, provide immigration advice.

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As outlined in *Section 6.5.2*, IAA provided assistance to STCAs and clients following the recent change to evidence requirements for passport eligibility.

Commonwealth stakeholders identified two key means whereby parents' experience of immigration and passport processes have been improved by IAA:

- IAA assists parents to navigate the immigration and passport processes:

"The benefit of IAA is they negotiate the immigration question for people, they talk to the adoption liaison team and feed it back to the callers which is a far better experience for the callers rather than going round and round and not knowing how to phrase what they mean."

- IAA provides additional emotional support during this stage in the ICA process:

"Callers themselves, they're getting a bit more than they were able to get ... before. From the social work perspective, they are able to give a bit of counselling to those callers where required."

Parent support and advocacy groups reported that IAA has improved adoptive parents' experience of applying for a visa or citizenship for their adopted child. The IAA liaises with immigration and the AGD on behalf of the adoptive parents, alleviating a major stress point for the parents.

Key finding:

- IAA's role as a conduit between clients and immigration and passport processes was seen as the key means whereby clients' experiences had been improved in this area

6.5. Does the service inform ICA policies and practices?

6.5.1. Stakeholder perspectives

Discussions with **external stakeholders** indicated a lack of transparency about the role of IAA in informing ICA policies and practices. A lack of clarity about the role of IAA meant that some stakeholders viewed ICA policies and procedures as being the sole remit of the AGD

Many recognised the unique position of IAA in engaging with a diverse range of service users (and the data collection associated with this engagement) as the service's primary avenue to potentially inform ICA policies and practices. This was particularly true in the case of Commonwealth agencies and parent support and advocacy groups:

*"Potentially IAA can assist in informing policy, knowing what people actually need; I can see it would be worthwhile to have a better understanding of the types of stories that are being brought to their attention because it might inform our policy developments."
(Commonwealth representative)*

*"IAA is at the frontline talking to adoptive parents about their experience every day. They are well positioned to give feedback to other agencies and inform their policy and practices."
(Commonwealth representative)*

"IAA is in touch with the needs and issues" (Parent support and advocacy group)

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6.5.2. IAA activities in relation to ICA policies and practice

Discussions with IAA senior management indicated that the service contributes to ICA policies and practices through a number of mechanisms.

Key examples of IAA's activities in this regard include:

- STCA-specific policy/practice
 - Review of ad-hoc/relative adoption policy with AGD/Victorian Central Authority
 - Participating in various Commonwealth forums (e.g. DIBP liaison meeting)
- Supporting external stakeholders in relation to specific issues:
 - Changes to evidence of citizenship for Australian passports (see Case Study 1)
 - China Program (see Case Study 2)
- Initiating discussions with AGD and each STCA on program-specific issues (Poland and Latvia)
- Facilitating an innovative workshop, in collaboration with BlueChilli, with adult adoptees and a range of sector stakeholders to test the scope of a 'concept' for adult adoptees (an international web application to assist tracing and reunification),
- Securing funding for a new Intercountry Adoption Tracing and Reunification Support Service – International Social Service (ISS) Australia. DSS has provided funding to ISS Australia to provide free intercountry adoption tracing and reunification support services.
- Participating in the start-up workshop for the Intercountry Adoption Tracing and Reunification Support Service
- Initiating meetings with ISS and Commonwealth stakeholders to establish links (e.g. the new ISS service will interface with DFAT and AGD country management roles).

Consultations with external stakeholders clearly illustrated they were unaware of IAA's work in these areas (*Section 6.5.1*).

6. Progress in relation to intended outcomes

Case study 1: Changes to citizenship evidence requirements for new Australian passports

At the STCA meeting in March 2016, DFAT and DIBP provided an update on changes to citizenship evidence requirements for new Australian passports, and that Australian birth certificates alone can no longer be accepted as evidence of citizenship for Australian passport applications. Media coverage of these changes caused confusion and distress amongst adult adoptees.

In light of this, IAA worked closely with relevant Commonwealth agencies (DIBP, DFAT, AGD) to develop information to explain this change and what it means for people born overseas. This information was posted on the IAA website. To assist with STCA practice, IAA agreed that affected intercountry adoptees can be referred to IAA as the information line social workers were best equipped to support people who are distressed.

IAA developed strategies for assisting anyone enquiring about these issues. Adoptees were reassured that if they were informed by the Australian Passport Office that their citizenship cannot be verified, this did not mean that the Government was saying that they are not an Australian citizen.

IAA also encouraged STCAs to let their key stakeholders (parent support groups etc.) know that IAA is able to assist people with this issue.

Case study 2: Changes to the China program

In August 2016, changes to the China program were announced. To assist STCAs and clients to deal with the implications of extended timeframes and changes to the profile of available adoptive children, IAA:

- Provided information about the changes on the IAA website
- Contacted all STCAs to offer assistance for families who might be considering other programs/wanting to explore eligibility
- Worked collaboratively with NSW CA and LifeWorks to deliver services to NSW-based clients.

Key findings:

- Discussions with external stakeholders indicated a lack of transparency about the role of IAA in informing ICA policies and practices
- Stakeholders were generally unaware of the range of policy and practice-related activities undertaken by IAA.

7. Stakeholder suggestions for improvement going forward

7. Stakeholder suggestions for improvement going forward

7.1. Introduction

Throughout the consultation process stakeholders identified a number of means by which the IAA service could be improved. Suggested improvements are listed by stakeholder group in this chapter.

7.2. Client and parent/advocacy group perspectives

Suggested changes made by survey respondents and parent/advocacy groups included:

- Detailed information on number of children available for adoption in each country
- Statistics about the likelihood of being matched with a child
- Additional information about:
 - Irregular adoptions
 - Visas and immigration issues
- Inclusion of stories to encourage applicants.

“We need more positive stories about adoption. The support that I would have been desperately appreciative of in this journey is some positive reinforcement that this was the right approach for us to be taking. There are very few publications that actually have positive stories to tell about the adoption process. It’s very politically charged”

- Additional post-adoption support⁴. *“Post adoption, it would have been really helpful to have support dealing with behavioural things, getting insight into that and help with that.”*
- National-level information and advocacy
- Greater assistance to people living overseas

“The support needs to be for all Australians, not just citizens living in Australia. It defeats the purpose of the system supposedly helping children and families.”

“We received no support whatsoever as Australian citizens – and continue to receive no support from the Australian Government. We can’t get advice, assistance or even the time of day.” (Respondent who went through ex patriate adoption process).

- Greater promotion of the service. *“I don’t understand why it’s not common knowledge that the service exists. The states might need to let people know”.*
- Website-specific suggestions included:
 - More detailed and in-depth information on countries and application processes
 - Improved navigability to make the website more user-friendly and interactive
 - More consistent and up to date information
 - Greater openness about the reality about the likelihood of a successful ICA
 - Details on the number of people are waiting and adoption wait times

⁴ In August 2016, DSS provided funding to Lifeworks to deliver their Intercountry Adoption Family Support Service which provides counselling support and information and support services to assist with a range of issues and challenges faced by families and adoptees who are or have undertaken an intercountry adoption

7. Stakeholder suggestions for improvement going forward

- Information on the allocation process. Most of the complaints that support groups receive are about the lack of transparency on the allocation process
- information on:
 - All the stages of adoption (and issues that may arise)
 - Research about ICA and post-adoption
 - Bonding issues/depression in adoptees (support groups)
 - Support for adult adoptees
 - A checklist to make sure you have the right documents
 - A live chat function.
- Clearer information on STCA and Commonwealth responsibilities, their inter-relationships and the impact on the ICA process
- Provide resources to schools, health professionals, and influence the curriculum for social workers at universities to include adoption.
- Assist adoptees:
 - In their search for identity documents
 - By providing information on and from countries of origin for adoptees
 - With return trips to birth countries including information and financial support as most returnees are in their twenties with very little or no money
 - In the transition from teens to adulthood on issues related to development and identity
 - Through improved counselling services. *“There needs to be competent trauma counsellors who are informed by the lived experiences of adult adoptees”*
 - Information to assist with being adopted. *“I wish there was more info to help adoptees like research papers or something that validates our feelings and helps us deal with adoption”*
- Provide peer reviewed academic papers and links to talks on best practice about controversial adoption-related issues
- Provide a forum for adoptive parents and their adoptive children to post ideas and have an online discussion and to dispel some of the myths around ICA. *“Most adoptees are too scared to talk about adoption breakdowns as people think adoption is a wonderful thing”.*

7.3. STCA perspectives

STCA suggestions included:

- Expansion of the post-adoption information available for:
 - Adoptive parents
 - Adoptees
- Further information regarding irregular adoptions including:
 - Relative adoptions
 - Ad hoc adoptions
 - Expatriate adoptions.

7. Stakeholder suggestions for improvement going forward

“We’ve been struggling with intercountry relative adoptions, ad hoc adoptions, to be able to refer people for more concrete advice would be good. People want answers about immigration and things like that. Maybe having people with more knowledge of that kind of stuff would be really helpful”.

- Promotion of IAA through:
 - Links to IAA on each STCA website. “The logical place for it to be advertised is on STCA websites”.
 - Provision of brochures in appropriate locations e.g. GP surgeries, reproduction medical groups, and Family Planning. A national TV ad was considered inappropriate given the small population of potential clients involved.
- Improve messaging about IAA. The importance of differentiating IAA’s role from that of STCAs and other stakeholders was considered key.

“The messaging is really important, and what the IAA do and how it’s different to what the STCAs do, bridge the overlap between the roles and responsibilities and what the IAA was set up to do”.

7.4. Academic perspectives

The academic informants listed a number of additional issues for consideration by IAA going forward:

- **Promotion of IAA.** Suggestions included television and other marketing avenues such as Facebook. Word of mouth was also considered important. *“If they only stick to spreading the word through the organisations, they will only get to the people in those organisations.”* The dangers of raising community expectations regarding the availability of children for ICA through advertising were also raised.
- Greater inclusion of intercountry **adoptees reference groups**. This could include *“a reference group with adoptees and actively getting adoptees with diverse backgrounds, not just Australian adoptees, but other people who have different experience with adoption in Australia and really making that a meaningful experience and not just a token thing”.*
- Undertaking and providing access to **research** so that ICA experiences in Australia are contextualised in a broader global context. This was considered important to help adult adoptees understand the issues and circumstances related to relinquishment and forced adoption overseas. *“Situations in different countries are different, children will be different, experiences, and reasons are all different.”*
- Making the **IAA website more inclusive** by:
 - Including a **broader representation of images** on the site. *“The first thing I see when I go on the website is two white parents and an Asian adopted child”*
 - Provision of **information/services for adoptee throughout their life**.

“There is a common perception that adoptees are kids who stay kids. They need to look at it long term, not just the teen years or the twenties. When adoptees themselves become parents, when people begin to think about their own experience and think about their birth mother carrying a child to term and then having that experience of the child being taken away or deciding to relinquish their child”

“The oldest intercountry adoptees are from Korea...[and] in their fifties now”.

7. Stakeholder suggestions for improvement going forward

- Provide information on **racism** towards intercountry adoptees and the implications this has for adoptees and their parents. *“All adoptees describe racism from everyday racism to overt racism. It’s not going to get better given the current climate. Racism is something Australians tend to deny and PAPA definitely deny it, and the adoptees experience it so there needs to be more information about that.”*
- Provision of **information on ICA to schools**. It was suggested that a link to resources for schools could be included on the IAA website. *“You hear horror stories about how adoption is handled in schools.”*

8. Discussion and conclusions

8. Discussion and conclusions

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the findings presented in chapters 5 and 6 are synthesised to address each of the evaluation questions. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of these findings and a list of key considerations for the IAA service going forward. Limitations pertaining to the data used are provided in *Section 4.5* while details related to the denominators used are explained in *Section 4.1.2*.

8.2. Was IAA implemented as intended

In this report, the implementation of IAA was assessed in terms of achievements related to the following items listed in the Reform Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan) (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*).

- Milestones/deliverables specified in Tranche 2
- Measures of success specific to the new support service.

8.2.1. Achievements against specified milestones/deliverables

These milestones and deliverables were structured under three distinct elements:

- The 1800 information line
- The IAA website
- Referral pathways from the information line.

The evaluation found that IAA successfully delivered all milestones/deliverables related to each of the three service elements.

However, links to the IAA website were not provided by all STCAs despite this being a requirement of the Reform Implementation Plan. In some cases, those providing links misnamed the IAA service. Given the importance of web browsing as a source of client information about ICA and IAA in particular, the absence of links to IAA may impact on the promotion of the IAA service. Furthermore, misnaming of the service in existing links may cause confusion for clients or hinder them in accessing the IAA service.

8.2.2. Achievements against specified measures of success

In the Reform Implementation Plan, 18 measures of success are specified that directly or indirectly apply to the IAA service (*Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015*). These measures were categorised into the following four groups in this report:

- Service uptake
- Operational parameters
- Client satisfaction
- STCA feedback.

Achievements related to each of group of measures are summarised in the following sections.

8. Discussion and conclusions

Service uptake

- The IAA service exceeded all four service uptake success measures specified in the Reform Implementation Plan.
- The highest levels of web traffic were evident for the three largest STCAs (NSW 27.4%, Victoria 21% and QLD 15.7%).

Operational parameters

- All KPIs related to call answering times were exceeded
- KPIs related to facilitated referrals and follow-up were found to be redundant because interaction patterns between IAA and clients differed substantially from what had been anticipated prior to service implementation. Few clients who used the service sought facilitated referrals or follow up
- Sharepoint data did not facilitate a full assessment of measures related to email response times
- The absence of follow-up data on referral outcomes meant that KPIs related to wrong referrals could not be assessed.

Client satisfaction

Multiple measures of success related to client satisfaction:

Measure 1

More than 65% of people report the new service was useful, including reducing time spent finding relevant information

- 62.1% of all IAA clients were categorised as having had their query resolved and only 1.8% were categorised as not being resolved. This surrogate measure suggests high levels of satisfaction with the service overall
- The absence of clear objective measures of client satisfaction limits the assessment of client satisfaction based on Sharepoint client data
- Survey respondents' perceptions of the usefulness of IAA was evident in the range of benefits listed, which included IAA providing:
 - Easy access to information
 - Additional support
 - An independent agency to talk with.

Measure 2a

Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the information provided

1800 information line

- Overall, almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) indicated that they had used the 1800 information line

8. Discussion and conclusions

- Half of the 42 respondents who reported having used the information line rated the information provided as either very useful or useful (21/42, 50.0%)

Measure 2b

Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the website

- Overall, almost 60% of the total parental respondents (131/220) had used the IAA website
- 61.8% (81/131) of parental respondents who had used the website ranked the website information as very useful or useful
- 29.5% (65/220) of all parental respondents indicated that they had used the online enquiry form
- Those who had used the online contact form reported high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness (44/65, 67.7%) and the usefulness (36/65, 55.4%) of the response they received.

Measure 2c

Of all the people who access the service at least 80% report satisfaction with the referral pathways provided by the information line

- One-third of client interactions (34.0%) with IAA resulted in some form of referral (*Section 5.3.4*). However, no measures of satisfaction are recorded on client satisfaction with the referrals provided. Furthermore, referral outcome information is not available from internal or external sources.
- Only 9.1% (20/220) of all parental respondents indicating that they had received a referral to their STCA and only 4.1% (9/220) to another service. This is despite almost one in five of all parental respondents (42/220, 19.1%) having indicated that they had used the 1800 information line and almost 60% of all parental respondents (131/220, 59.5%) having indicated they used the website
- High levels of referral uptake were evident, with 12/20 (60.0%) of those who were referred to their STCA subsequently contacting their STCA and 7/9 (77.7%) of those referred to another service contacting that service.

Measure 3

Fewer than 5% of calls or emails are complaints about the service

- No complaints were received about the IAA service between May 2015 and May 2016

Measure 4

Fewer than 10% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes

- Less than 1% of calls and emails are complaints about ICA processes.

8. Discussion and conclusions

Measure B1a

STCAs report the service is improving people's understanding and expectations about ICA

- Discussions with STCA representatives highlighted a lack of clarity at STCA and client level regarding the role of IAA in ICA because of:
 - The absence of a Commonwealth-state agreement to document IAA's role and govern relationships between stakeholders. In April 2016, an agreement was made to review the Commonwealth-state agreement and thus develop a process to formalise IAA's role
 - Media coverage during the early implementation phase that generated unrealistic expectations of ICA processes
- A number of STCA representatives acknowledged IAA's dual role in improving their understanding of ICA as well as the understanding of their clients
- Overall, those based in the smaller jurisdictions tended to express more positive assessments of the role and contribution of the IAA than their larger counterparts
- In April 2016, an agreement was made to review the Commonwealth-state agreement and thus develop a process to formalise IAA's role.

Measure B1b

STCAs report an improvement in their experience of working with the Commonwealth government agencies

- During the early implementation phase, working relationships between IAA and STCAs may have been influenced by the lack of clarity regarding IAA's role:
 - STCAs were particularly concerned about service duplication
 - Some STCAs reported a lack of understanding/differentiation between IAA's role and that of AGD, thus making transitioning from AGD to IAA as the central information/contact point problematic in some cases
- From a Commonwealth agency perspective, IAA was seen as instrumental in improving working relationships and in clarifying roles in the ICA process.

The stakeholder perspectives presented in this report were collected at a particular point in time and therefore, do not reflect any recent changes that have occurred as a result of recent IAA activities reported in *Section 5.4*.

8.2.3. Post-implementation IAA service delivery developments

Since its initial implementation, the IAA has evolved beyond the original parameters specified in the Reform Implementation Plan (Intercountry Adoption Reform: Implementation Plan 2015). Many of these changes have been a proactive response to identified needs and stakeholder consultation/feedback.

Developments to date can be categorised into three groups:

- Structural changes

8. Discussion and conclusions

- Teams have been restructured so that there is now one team in DSS which includes the IAA service and the policy function. This restructuring is expected to result in closer linkages between service delivery and policy.
- Expansion of client focus
 - To include greater concentration on all stages in the ICA process
- Stakeholder engagement
 - In July and August 2016, IAA undertook service visits to the STCAs and local service providers to increase face-to-face engagement and clarify the role of IAA

The following activities were reported to be currently underway:

- Addressing specific stakeholder needs including expatriate stakeholders and post-adoption support
- Development of an online eligibility tool
- Consideration of a new client record management system.

8.2.4. Are prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents' experiences of the ICA process positive?

Achievements regarding access to information and referral to support services are discussed separately in the following sections.

Access to information

Four elements of access to information were considered in this report:

- Stakeholder assessment of the contribution of IAA to information access
- Uptake issues
- Comprehensiveness of the information provided
- Client expectations.

Stakeholder assessment of the contribution of IAA to information access

Stakeholders differed in their assessment of the contribution this information made to the ICA community:

- Commonwealth stakeholders:
 - generally agreed that IAA has improved access to information
 - considered the phone service was seen as particularly useful noting that the IAA service overall was not seen as a substitute for the STCAs
- At STCA level:
 - the IAA website was seen as important precursor to STCA contact and provided clients with information in a more user-friendly format than had previously been available
 - Some queried the value-add of this information because it was also available on the AGD website

8. Discussion and conclusions

- Academics welcomed the provision of a centralised information service.

Any duplication of information provision to service users by IAA and the Commonwealth agencies/STCAs was not seen to be problematic. The emotionally-charged nature of ICA processes meant service users triangulate and confirm advice/information from multiple sources.

Uptake issues

- Underutilisation of the 1800 information line was evident with 75.5% (166/220) of survey respondents indicating they had not used the 1800 information line
- The two main reasons cited by non-users for not having used the IAA 1800 information line were that respondents did not know about the service (63/166, 38.0%) or that they had contacted their STCA directly (47/166, 28.31%)
- More than one-third of all survey respondents (36.8%, 81/220) had not used the website
- The two main reasons for not having used the IAA website were that the service did not exist when the respondent had started the process (35/81, 43.2%) or that respondents did not know about the service (32/81, 39.5%).

Comprehensiveness of the information provided

IAA's primary focus on the information needs of prospective adoptive parents during the service's initial implementation phase was seen by many of the external stakeholders to limit the comprehensive of the information provided. In particular, gaps were identified in relation to adult adoptees, expatriate adoptions and ad hoc adoptions.

Parent support and advocacy groups highlighted the importance of web information being accurate and comprehensive.

For academic informants, a key consideration was the need for IAA to recognise that the information needs of ICA stakeholders differ considerably depending on their stage in the process.

Client expectations

Stakeholders indicated that client assessment of the utility of available information was informed by their expectations, some of which were unrealistic.

8.2.5. Are adoptive parents' experiences of immigration and passport processes improved?

IAA's role as a conduit between clients and immigration and passport processes was seen as the key means whereby clients' experiences had been improved.

8.2.6. Does the service inform ICA policies and practices?

Discussions with IAA indicated that service representatives contribute to ICA policies and practices through a number of mechanisms. Consultations with external stakeholders clearly illustrated these stakeholders were unaware of IAA's work in these areas.

8. Discussion and conclusions

Key examples of IAA's activities in this regard (*Section 6.5.2*) include:

- STCA-specific policy/practice (e.g. Review of ad-hoc/relative adoption policy with AGD/Victorian Central Authority and participating in various Commonwealth forums)
- Supporting external stakeholders in relation to specific issues such as changes to evidence of citizenship for Australian passports and changes to country-specific programs
- Initiating discussions with AGD and each STCA on program-specific issues
- Facilitating and participating in workshops and forums
- Securing funding for a new Intercountry Adoption Tracing and Reunification Support Service – International Social Service (ISS) Australia.

8.3. Implications of findings – key considerations going forward

The findings of this evaluation indicate that IAA has:

- Achieved all milestones and deliverables specified in the Reform Implementation Plan
- Achieved or is demonstrating strong progress in relation to most of the measures of success and KPIs specified in the Reform Implementation Plan.

However, it is also apparent that:

- Many of these KPI are now redundant as the patterns of client interaction and the evolving nature of service provision extend beyond that which was envisaged prior to implementation.
- Current data collection and management does not adequately allow assessment against all the current KPIs
- For STCAs, there has been a lack of:
 - Clarity about the role of IAA influencing stakeholder engagement in the early stages of implementation
 - Transparency about IAA activities particularly in the area of policy and practice
- Uptake of IAA services by targeted service users has been limited by:
 - A lack of awareness about IAA
 - Lack of differentiation between IAA and other ICA stakeholders (STCAS and AGD in particular) which may have caused confusion
 - A perception in the early stages that the service was primarily targeting prospective adoptive parents.

Efforts to resolve these issues have already commenced. Of particular note, is the expansion of IAA's focus to include people at all stages of the ICA process, the engagement of LifeWorks and ISS to assist adoptees with counselling and family reunification, and IAA's recent round of service visits designed to foster stakeholder engagement and clarify IAA's role. Revisions to the Commonwealth-state agreement will do much to clarify IAAs role in relation to other Commonwealth agencies.

8. Discussion and conclusions

Going forward, a number of factors warrant consideration to facilitate the ongoing development of IAA and ensure its capacity to meet its KPIs and the expectations of the ICA community. Key considerations include:

- Review current KPIs to more accurately reflect the current and future scope of IAA's activities
- Review current data collection and management system so that its capacity to capture and analyse data is enhanced
- Increased data sharing between IAA and STCAs so that referral outcomes can be established
- Continued engagement with STCAs to:
 - Further develop working relationships
 - Communicate IAA activities, particularly in relation to policy and practice, and to jointly collaborate in the development of these policies and practice
 - Promote IAA on STCA websites. At the time of the website review undertaken in this evaluation, not all STCAs currently did so (*Table 3-3*) and this may impact on client awareness of the IAA services in these jurisdictions
- Greater promotion of IAA so that its target clients are aware of the breadth of its services
- Clarification of IAA's role. This not only involves clarifying IAA's role in relation to other Commonwealth agencies through revisions to the Commonwealth-state agreement, but also in the public perception by differentiating its functions from AGD. Ongoing engagement with target clients will assist in this regard as would revision to the web content on both the IAA and AGD websites.

The list of factors presented above directly aligns with IAA's KPIs and to the gaps identified in this evaluation. Consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders identified a number of key suggestions for consideration going forward (*Chapter 7*). These latter suggestions give voice to some of the needs and visions of other key stakeholders in the ICA community and warrant further consideration.

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

A.1. Background

To inform the evaluation of the ICA Australia (IAA) service, a brief literature and web scan was undertaken to identify key challenges and considerations relating to ICA (ICA), as well as the information and support needs of potential and actual ICA clients.

The results of the scan are summarised in this appendix.

A.2. Introduction

As Cuthbert et al. (2010) point out: “Adoption has always been ambiguously situated between being understood primarily as a mechanism by which children in need of family may be placed with caring parents, and one by which the interests of adults in need of children to form a family may be served”. This ambiguity highlights the two distinct stakeholder groups in the adoption arrangement, parents and children, whose needs and expectations warrant acknowledgement particularly in the ICA context.

The 2014 Australian Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) report on ICA recommended that there be an “increased focus on better support for prospective adoptive parents throughout the process of adoption even if it is not possible to substantially impact the rate of adoption” (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014, p. 17).

Appropriate and adequate preparation and relevant expectation-setting for prospective ICA parents is required under the Hague Convention, and may involve counselling (both pre- and post-adoption ‘as necessary’), training and education—although how this is achieved varies (Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) 2008). Good preparation has been associated with satisfaction; and lower risk of medical, psychological, and developmental challenges (Paulsen & Merighi 2009).

A.3. Process related challenges

The Hague Conference on Private International Law notes the importance of (and challenges associated with) defined roles, responsibilities and communications between a large number of organisations and authorities involved in ICA. These issues are further compounded in countries with a federal structure (Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) 2008).

The impediments to ICA in Australia identified in the IDC report include:

- The small number of countries with which Australia has an ICA program
- The cost, waiting time and uncertainty of the process, related to both Australian and international processes
- The requirements imposed and quality of the administration of ICA processes by STCAs
- The (low) standard of post-adoption services (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

There is a perception that adoption (particularly ICA) in Australia is a lengthy and costly process (Adopt Change 2015). In addition, the Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on ICA identified the following challenges:

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

- The Commonwealth's approach to selecting ICA partner countries
- The current Commonwealth/state model of regulating ICA and the lack of nationally consistent laws, policies and procedures
- The quality of States' and Territories' administration and level of support provided to prospective adoptive parents
- The standard of post-adoption support services (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

However, a literature review undertaken for DSS “found no studies specifically linking the adoption process and the rates of ICA, and the processes are not identified as significant drivers of rates of adoption in the empirical literature” (Katz, Hilferty, & Van Wichelen, 2016, p. 33).

A.4. Child related factors

The characteristics of children available for ICA is changing over time. Increasingly, children with special needs including older children, those with illness or impairment, and those who are part of a sibling group are representing a larger proportion of children available for adoption (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014). While ICAs involving children with special needs have not increased as much in Australia as in other parts of the world, this trend nevertheless brings new challenges to prospective and successful ICA clients.

The groups identified as ‘special needs’ by countries with which Australia has an ICA program vary, but include:

- Older children
- Sibling groups
- Those who have experienced social, emotional and psychological deprivation
- Those with:
 - complex health conditions
 - developmental or psychiatric disorders
 - behavioural or social conditions (Commonwealth of Australia Department of Social Services n.d.).

Many ICA adoptees experience institutionalisation prior to adoption. This can have a profound impact on the health and development of the adoptee (Meese 2005a) and pose particular parenting challenges to the adoptive parents.

In line with the objectives of the current evaluation, this section focuses, in particular, on child-related factors that pose challenges and or information/support needs for prospective or actual ICA clients.

Health

Post-institutionalised ICA adoptees typically exhibit health problems, delayed growth, and delayed social, cognitive, motor, and language skills at the time of their adoption. The extent to which these delays can be overcome will depend on the age at adoption (Meese 2005b). Given the steady decline in

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

the availability of ICA children aged one to four years (*Section 2.3*), adoptive parents are increasingly likely to adopt ICA children who experience such delays.

Attachment and emotional wellbeing

Institutionalised care also impacts on the attachment and emotional wellbeing of ICA adoptees as few children experience the kind of responsive care pre-adoption that is needed to foster attachment security. Children adopted later in the first year of life or after show remarkable variability in their attachments (Meese 2005b).

Learning difficulties

Compromised development can also generate learning difficulties. This is particularly true in the case of ICAs because the adoption process generally involves the loss and replacement of the child's first language. This can result in 'subtractive bilingualism' or 'language arrest' (Roberts et al. 2005), and may lead to delayed acquisition of second language skills (Roberts et al., 2005; Beverly, McGuinness, & Blanton, 2008; Gauthier & Genesee, 2011).

A.5. Ongoing issues in adolescence and adulthood

Issues for adoptees related to ICA are not confined to childhood or the immediate post-adoption period. Rather, it is important to recognise that adoption is a life-long experience (Walton 2012) and as children mature, the ICA experience may impact them in a number of key ways as discussed below.

Identity and cultural connection

An important dimension of ICA is the intercultural dynamic, particularly as many ICAs involve children of different racial, cultural and linguistic background to their adoptive parents (Kim, 2002).

Intercountry adoptees' ties to first families are usually severed, hence the influence of first families on identity formation is limited. Consequently, negotiation of race and cultural issues is primarily conducted through a Western lens. A key issue for adoptees is the difficulty and challenge of negotiating and reclaiming the 'unknown' part of their identity (Walton 2012).

For these reasons, adoptees need to be consulted about the kinds of post-adoption services that would be most helpful for them at different stages of their lives. These concepts are fundamental to providing post-adoption services that are aimed at supporting adoptees and their families, not just adoptive parents and the newly adopted child (Walton, 2012). It has been argued that intercountry adoptees need to be supported by governments to play a greater advisory and educative roles so that their needs at different stages of their life are met (Willing & Fronck, 2014).

Likewise, while there is an emerging literature generated by researchers who are intercountry adoptees, birth families remain almost invisible in this literature (Willing, Cuthbert, Fronck, & Cuthbert, 2012).

Longer term needs

Studies on intercountry adoptees have shown evidence of longer-term emotional, behavioural, and social problems. These include high rates of suicide, suicide attempts, depression, and alcohol and drug abuse (Kim 2002).

A.6. Information and support needs for people at all stages of ICA

The importance of adequate preparation and realistic expectations among prospective adoptive parents has been highlighted in the literature, with Compassion for Orphans in New Zealand noting that “the type and degree of support received by the adoptive family in the form of pre and post placement services and broader community and family support are also key predictors of success” (Compassion for Orphans 2014).

Key challenges and considerations identified in this literature scan include factors related to both the process of ICA, the characteristics of children currently deemed in need and the ongoing and long-term needs of ICA adoptees and their parents.

Potential and actual adoptive parents require information and support to prepare and guide them not only through the logistics of the process of ICA, but also in the longer term.

Information and support for prospective parents

In an Australian study, professionals involved in the adoption process highlighted key messages for prospective ICA clients: in particular the focus on children’s need (i.e. finding families for children, rather than children for families) and the importance of flexibility for coping with a complex and lengthy process, as well as the transitions required once adoption has taken place (Young 2011).

A 2010 document prepared by the U.S. Center for Adoption Policy recommended adoption agencies provide adequate preparation for caring for children with particular medical and psychological needs, identify local services and support networks, and establish formal mentoring relationships with other ICA parents (Center for Adoption Policy 2010).

It has also been reported that prospective ICA parents are often experiencing personal issues of grief and loss related to infertility. Consequently, education, empathy, support and/or counselling may be important as they transition from fertility services to ICA processes (Australian Association of Social Workers 2015).

Support through the process of ICA

When actively pursuing ICA, prospective parents require accurate and transparent information about the process, both from the Australian perspective (including both federal and state/territory-specific legislation and requirements) and that of the country of origin of the potential adoptee. These needs span the timeframe from initial consideration of ICA through to finalising the legal requirements in both Australia and the country of origin and bringing a child/children to Australia.

Ongoing support needs of adoptive parents

Post-adoption support has been identified as an important component of the ICA process, and one that is often seen to be inadequate. As noted in Section, ICA families face particular long-term issues and challenges. A 2013 survey of ICA families in Queensland identified the first two years after placement as a key period in which support for families is lacking (The Benevolent Society 2013). In the U.S, the Center for Adoption Policy recommends ‘intensive support services’ post-placement and, importantly, identifies both the medical, developmental and psychological needs of adopted children and the support and mental health needs of adoptive parents (Center for Adoption Policy 2010).

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

Professional support and formal and informal networking opportunities can greatly assist ICA parents in navigating the challenges they are likely to face. However, while adoptive parents recognise the need for specialists to be aware of the unique needs of ICA children, the limited availability of professionals with skills in the area can be a source of frustration for them (Golding et al. 2015). Despite an overwhelming amount of information being available on the internet, easily accessible, reliable information on the topics of most relevance may be more difficult to find (Golding et al. 2015).

Other support needs include helping parents to navigate the potential psychological/psychosocial and cultural challenges faced by many ICA parents and children. The ACT's information sheet on ICA states that "Applicants must be able to provide a loving, consistent and stable family environment for an overseas child. Intercountry adoptive parenting also requires a commitment to, and respect for, the child's biological heritage and cultural origins. Applicants must be willing to establish and maintain links for a child with their culture of origin to ensure the child has an integrated sense of cultural identity. This involves the capacity to embrace life as an identified inter-racial family" (ACT Government Community Services 2015). Similarly, in Victoria, Section 35e of the Adoption Regulations mandates that "the applicants have the capacity to provide appropriate support to the maintenance of a child's cultural identity and religious faith (if any)" (Intercountry Adoption Victoria 2015).

A.7. International models of ICA support

ICA policies and practices vary around the world. Even among Hague Convention signatories, differing local legislation and contexts (including the involvement of government, non-government and private organisations in the ICA process) result in different models of support for prospective and actual ICA parents. Because of this, international models of ICA support processes may not be relevant to the Australian context.

Nevertheless, this section summarises models of ICA support in several countries other than Australia, chosen for the size of their ICA program and English language (to allow analysis of policies and support resources). The information presented is based on a brief scan of available literature and international websites, and is therefore not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, the aim of the scan was to identify any models/modalities of support not currently available (but potentially of use) in Australia. Relevant information from the USA, Canada, United Kingdom and New Zealand is summarised below.

In addition, while waiting times are a frustration often reported by prospective ICA parents, there is little evidence that improving processes or reducing waiting times would affect ICA rates (Katz et al. 2016) (although it would likely affect parental satisfaction with the process).

USA

In the U.S., prospective ICA clients work with accredited adoption service providers to facilitate the process, overseen by the Office of Children's Issues (OCI) within the Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State (the Central Authority for the purposes of the Hague Convention).

The roles of the OCI include the provision of information about the adoption process to prospective adoptive parents, adoption service providers, and others. The Bureau hosts a number of webpages dedicated to information regarding ICA, including country-specific alerts and notices (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs n.d.). Information available through this webpage includes a guide to the Hague Convention for prospective ICA clients. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

responsible for assessing the eligibility and suitability of prospective ICA parents, as well as the eligibility of the child to immigrate into the country (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2014).

The Child Welfare Information Gateway (provided by the Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) also provides information for prospective parents, with links to information from the Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (Child Welfare Information Gateway n.d.).

The Center for Adoption Policy in the U.S, an independent organisation, aims to remove legal, structural and institutional barriers to domestic and ICA (Center for Adoption Policy n.d.).

“Systems such as the privatised adoption system in the USA which operate with little government involvement have moved to a market economy with few safeguards for children or mothers. Parents are seen as customers with the emphasis on speedily meeting demand and their needs rather than operating carefully and cautiously ‘in the best interests of the child’. This ‘market’ is only available to wealthy prospective parents.” (Clare, 2014, p. 11).

Canada

Similar to the Australian process for ICA, ICA Services (IAS, located within the government Department of Citizenship and Immigration), is the federal central authority for ICA that facilitates communication and co-operation between local, national and international authorities and plays a role in advocacy and issue resolution, policy/procedural advice and the collection and dissemination of information (Government of Canada 2012). Each Canadian province/territory acts as a local authority with its own guidelines, legislation and requirements.⁵ Private for- and not-for-profit agencies are also accredited to support prospective ICA parents through the process.

In addition to government and private agencies, the Adoption Council of Canada is a national non-profit organisation that “strives to inform, educate and provide Canadians with resources about adoption issues in Canada” (not only ICA). The organisation’s website includes a downloadable toolkit for starting a post-adoption support group.

In some parts of the country, specialised adoption clinics provide pre-adoption counselling, medical assessments upon placement of children within homes and follow-up services and referrals for intercountry and domestic adoptees.

New Zealand

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Social Development (through the Department of Child, Youth & Family) is the Central Authority under the Hague Convention. The Department runs a centralised adoption education and preparation program, to be undertaken after an application has been submitted. This consists of a generic adoption and an additional ICA-specific workshop.

Prospective ICA parents can also engage the services of one of three accredited agencies to support them through the ICA process (Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand, Compassion for Orphans and Adoption First Steps). These organisations provide their own support services to parents and adoptees throughout and after the adoption process such as parent networks, educational resources and events, post-adoption support and assistance in searching for birth families. They also are accredited to perform additional roles within the ICA process, such as assessment (Adoption First Steps) and child

⁵ <http://www.adoption.ca/faqs>

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

placement (ICANZ). Compassion for Orphans is a charitable organisation that provides free services for prospective and ICA parents. In contrast, Adoption First Steps charges for its services (e.g. \$500 per couple for their 7-module online education program and \$1,000 per couple for an education workshop) (Adoption First Steps 2014).

For example, Compassion for Orphans (an accredited adoption agency with programs with Chile and India) provides a raft of education and support resources and services throughout the process (Compassion for Orphans 2014). Similarly, Adoption First Steps provides services “to educate, assess and prepare” prospective ICA parents.

United Kingdom

In the UK, adoption agencies (who are either part of a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency) prepare and support all adoptive parents through the process of adoption.

In the context of ICA, the Centre for Adoption (IAC) is a voluntary adoption agency that evolved from a government-funded helpline to an independent charity to its current form, an agency “providing a comprehensive service to people considering both domestic and ICA”. It offers a telephone advice line (for prospective adoptive parents and adult adoptees seeking information), information sessions, workshops (both general and addressing specific topics such as inter-racial adoption and adoption of sibling groups). The organisation also holds ad hoc post-adoption support workshops and a (charged) face-to-face post-adoption support service staffed by social workers who are themselves adoptive parents (IAC: The Centre for Adoption, 2016).

A.8. Data and informing policy

The Hague Conference website publishes signatory-specific statistics on ICA on its website (Hague Conference on Private International Law 2016). Through the scan, several country-specific data sources were also identified, including:

- Some data on ICA in Canada are available on the Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada 2015)
- The US Bureau of Consular Affairs [website](#), that includes an interactive statistical interface showing ICAs by country of origin, U.S. state, year and visa type. The Bureau also releases annual reports on ICA that detail:
 - The number of ICAs (involving both immigration to and emigration from the U.S.)
 - Disruptions in placements (with reasons and resolutions)
 - The average time taken for completion of a Convention adoption (by country)
 - Costs of ICA through adoption service providers (US Department of State 2015).

However, little information was found regarding the use of ICA data to inform policy, although the IAS in Canada notes as one of its roles “collecting and disseminating information specific to ICA (adoption legislation, policies and practices of countries of origin, statistical data and research)” (Government of Canada 2012). Despite this, numerous organisations internationally play a role in advocacy around ICA issues (both local and international), including the U.S. Center for Adoption Policy and, in Australia, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Adopt Change.

Appendix A. Key considerations and support needs in ICA

In its position statement of ICA, the AASW noted concern that the views of adoptees are not sought regarding policy reform, and support services for this group may be lacking (Australian Association of Social Workers 2015).

Appendix B. List of people consulted

A.9. List of people consulted

Table B-1: List of people consulted

List of people consulted	
Commonwealth departments	Number of people consulted
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	2
Department of and Cabinet	1
Attorney General's Department	2
Department of Immigration and Border Protection	4
DSS and implementation staff	Number of people consulted
Current IAA service staff	5
Other DSS staff	8
State and Territory Central Authorities	Number of people consulted
Northern Territory	1
Tasmania	2
New South Wales	2
Queensland	2
South Australia	1
Australian Capital Territory	1
Western Australia	3
Victoria	2
Academics	Number of people consulted
Professor Shurlee Swain	1
Dr Jessica Walton	1
Dr Patricia Fronck	1
Support/advocacy groups	Number of people consulted
Tasmanian Adoptive Consultative Committee	1
Families with Children from China	1
Adopt Change	1
Intercountry Adoptee Voices	1
Recently engaged service providers	Number of people consulted
LifeWorks	1
The International Social Service (ISS)	2
IAA service users	Number of people consulted
People who had used IAA	28
People who had not used IAA	11
Total number of people consulted	85

Appendix C. Survey results

A.10. Introduction

This Appendix provides additional material related to client experiences to that presented in the main body of the report. Findings are based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data derived from the client survey, in-depth follow-up discussions with survey respondents and discussions with key advocacy and support groups. Findings from both sets of informants are collated and discussed under each of the key evaluation questions. This discussion is preceded by a profile of survey respondents.

A.11. Survey findings

Profile of respondents

Demographics

A total of 230 surveys were completed at the close of the survey on 30 June 2016 (*Table B-1*). The majority of respondents (82.2%) were female and more than half (53.0%) were between 30 and 45 years of age. More than one in five respondents (22.2%) identified as being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Few reported to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background (2.2%).

The vast majority (95.7%) of respondents were Australian citizens, and similar proportions of respondents resided in Queensland (17.8%), Victoria (16.1%), South Australia (14.8%) and New South Wales (14.3%). A small number of respondents were from the Northern Territory (6.1%) Western Australia (4.8%), and Tasmania (3.5%), and the Australian Capital Territory was only represented by a single respondent (0.4%). Of note, 22.2% did not indicate a state or territory of residence, perhaps because they were living overseas at the time of completing the survey or they wished to ensure complete anonymity. Less than 10% of survey respondents who had adopted or were considering adoption had moved from one state to another during the process.

Table C-1: Summary profile of survey respondents

Characteristic	n	%
Jurisdiction		
ACT	1	0.4%
NSW	33	14.3%
NT	14	6.1%
QLD	41	17.8%
SA	34	14.8%
TAS	8	3.5%
VIC	37	16.1%
WA	11	4.8%
Not stated	51	22.2%
Age		
18-25 years	2	0.9%
26-29 years	10	4.3%

Appendix C. Survey results

Characteristic	n	%
30-45 years	122	53.0%
46-55 years	74	32.2%
56-65 years	17	7.4%
Over 65 years	3	1.3%
Not stated	2	0.9%
Gender		
Female	189	82.2%
Male	39	17.0%
Not stated	2	0.9%
Marital status		
De facto	12	5.2%
Divorced	2	0.9%
Married	199	86.5%
Other (please specify)	3	1.3%
Single	13	5.7%
Not stated	1	0.4%
Residency status		
An Australian citizen	220	95.7%
An Australian resident	7	3.0%
Not stated	3	1.3%
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background		
No	176	76.5%
Yes	51	22.2%
Not stated	3	1.3%
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander		
No	223	97.0%
Yes	5	2.2%
Not stated	2	0.9%
Dependent children		
No	95	41.3%
Yes	134	58.3%
Not stated	1	0.4%
Other dependents		
No	210	91.3%
Yes	16	7.0%

Appendix C. Survey results

Characteristic	n	%
Not stated	4	1.7%

Family status

The majority of survey respondents reported being either married (86.5%) or in a de facto relationship (5.2%). A small proportion (5.7%) reported being single and 1.3% reported their status as 'other'. More than half (58.3%) reported having dependent children, and 7.0% 'other dependents'.

ICA status and motivation

Respondents were asked to describe their current situation in terms of the stage of ICA they were currently in. *Table B-2* provides details of respondents' stage in the ICA process. More than half of the survey respondents (55.3%) wanted to adopt from overseas, either as a first-time or repeat ICA parent. A further 31.7% were prior ICA parents who were in the post-adoption phase and were not considering further ICA. The remainder comprised respondents who:

- Had decided against ICA (8.7%)
- Were adult adoptees (2.2%)
- Were ineligible (2.2%) on the basis of:
 - Relationship status (3)
 - Wanting to adopt from a non-partner country (1)
 - Processing delays meant someone had waited eight years then 'timed out' (1).

Table C-2: Respondents' current stage in the ICA process

Category	Stage description	n	%
Wanting to adopt	<i>First time:</i> A person wanting to adopt, or in the process of adopting, a child from overseas	108	47.0%
	<i>Repeat:</i> A person who has already adopted a child/children from overseas and am now seeking to adopt another child	19	8.3%
Post adoption	A person who has adopted a child from overseas	73	31.7%
Did not continue	A person who has decided against adopting a child from overseas	20	8.7%
Adult adoptee	An adoptee from overseas	5	2.2%
Ineligible	Survey respondent who was not eligible for the ICA program	5	2.2%
Total		230	100.0%

Profile of respondents who considered/adopted from overseas

The analysis presented in the following sections relates to the 220 parental respondents who were either considering ICA, had already adopted or had decided not to proceed. Responses from the five ineligible respondents and the five adult adoptees are excluded from the descriptive statistics in this section.

It is important to note that not all respondents provided responses to all survey questions.

Appendix C. Survey results

Year respondents started the ICA process

Of those respondents who answered a question regarding the year they started the adoption process they were currently involved in, more than half (51.3%) did so prior to the implementation of IAA (Table B-3). Just over a quarter of respondents (26.38%) began their engagement with ICA in 2015/2016.

Table C-3: Year respondent commenced current adoption process

Year started	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1991	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	1	0.4%
1993	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	1	0.4%
1997	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	1	0.4%
1998	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	1	0.4%
1999	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	1	0.4%
2000	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	1	5.3%	2	0.9%
2001	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	4	5.5%	-	0.0%	4	1.8%
2002	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	2	2.7%	-	0.0%	2	0.9%
2003	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	10	13.7%	-	0.0%	10	5.0%
2004	2	1.9%	-	0.0%	6	8.2%	-	0.0%	8	3.6%
2005	1	0.9%	1	5.0%	9	12.3%	-	0.0%	11	5.0%
2006	4	3.7%	-	0.0%	5	6.8%	-	0.0%	9	4.1%
2007	1	0.9%	-	0.0%	5	6.8%	1	5.3%	7	3.1%
2008	1	0.9%	1	5.0%	2	2.7%	-	0.0%	4	1.8%
2009	1	0.9%	-	0.0%	4	5.5%	4	21.0%	9	4.1%
2010	2	1.9%	1	5.0%	2	2.7%	-	0.0%	5	2.2%
2011	2	1.9%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	3	1.3%
2012	6	5.6%	-	0.0%	3	4.1%	1	5.3%	10	4.5%
2013	3	2.8%	-	0.0%	5	6.8%	1	5.3%	9	4.1%
2014	10	9.3%	3	15.0%	2	2.7%	1	5.3%	16	7.2%
Sub-total pre-IAA	33	30.7%	6	30.0%	66	90.3%	9	47.5%		51.3%
2015	24	22.2%	6	30.0%	1	1.4%	6	31.5%	37	16.8%
2016	19	17.6%	2	10.0%	-	0.0%	1	5.3%	22	10.1%
Sub-total post-IAA	43	39.8%	8	40.0%	1	1.4%	7	36.8%		26.8%
Not stated	32	29.5%	6	30.0%	6	8.2%	3	15.7%	47	21.3%
Total	108	100%	20	100%	73	100%	19	100%	220	100%

* No data was for the years not listed in this table.

Appendix C. Survey results

Motivation for considering ICA

Overall, the most common motivation for wanting to adopt a child from overseas was the inability to have biological children (34.5%) (Table B-4). Other key reasons were a desire to help a child overseas (18.2%) and family completion (17.3%). This ranking was largely consistent across the different groups with the exception of repeat ICA parents for whom family completion was their main motivation.

Table C-4: Main reason for considering adopting a child from overseas

Reason for considering adopting a child from overseas	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Not able to have biological children	30	27.8%	4	21.1%	33	45.2%	9	45.0%	76	34.5%
For health reasons*	6	5.6%	-	-	5	6.8%	-	-	11	5.0%
To help children overseas	26	24.1%	3	15.8%	9	12.3%	2	10.0%	40	18.2%
To help a family member	4	3.7%	-	-	1	1.4%	3	15.0%	8	3.6%
To complete my family	19	17.6%	7	36.8%	12	16.4%	-	-	38	17.3%
Because of my religious beliefs	2	1.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0.9%
Other (please specify)	8	7.4%	3	15.8%	7	9.6%	3	15.0%	21	9.5%
Not stated	13	12.0%	2	10.5%	6	8.2%	3	15.0%	24	10.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

* For example: a pregnancy was too risky, I have a genetic condition that could be passed on to a biological child.

Appendix C. Survey results

Profile of respondents' ICA preferences

Overall, China and Thailand emerged as the two main countries that parental respondents were most interested in adopting a child from (15.0 and 14.1% respectively) (*Table B-5*).

Analysis of the free text comments provided in the 'other' category found two main groups of responses:

- Respondents with an interest in countries that were not part of the ICA program
- Respondents who did not have a country preference.

Table C-5: Main country from which respondents were interested in adopting a child

Country of choice	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Chile	4	3.7%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	5	2.3%
China	12	11.1%	2	10.5%	19	26.0%	-	0.0%	33	15.0%
Colombia	4	3.7%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	2	10.0%	7	3.2%
Hong Kong	1	0.9%	1	5.3%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	3	1.4%
Latvia	1	0.9%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	1	0.5%
Philippines	10	9.3%	1	5.3%	5	6.8%	-	0.0%	16	7.3%
Poland	4	3.7%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	-	0.0%	4	1.8%
South Africa	7	6.5%	1	5.3%	-	0.0%	2	10.0%	10	4.5%
South Korea	5	4.6%	4	21.1%	6	8.2%	-	0.0%	15	6.8%
Sri Lanka	1	0.9%	-	0.0%	1	1.4%	-	0.0%	2	0.9%
Taiwan	9	8.3%	4	21.1%	8	11.0%	-	0.0%	21	9.5%
Thailand	11	10.2%	1	5.3%	16	21.9%	3	15.0%	31	14.1%
Other	26	24.1%	2	10.5%	9	12.3%	9	45.0%	46	20.9%
Not stated	13	12.0%	3	15.8%	6	8.2%	4	20.0%	26	11.8%
Total	108	100%	19	100%	73	100%	20	100%	220	100.0%

Qualifying for the program was listed by almost a quarter of all respondents (24.1%, 53/220) as being the main reason for their country choice (*Table B-6*). This was particularly true for those wanting to adopt for the first time and ranked second among those who were post-adoption. However, for the post-adoption group, liking the culture ranked first as the highest-ranked reason for their country choice.

An analysis of responses in the 'other category' found that choice was motivated by:

- The cultural background of either the respondent and/or children they had already adopted through ICA
- Pragmatism (e.g. country was the best match for respondent in terms of respondent age, speediest allocation)

Appendix C. Survey results

- Connections with the country (e.g. extended family living there, connections through church or other organisations)
- Altruism (e.g. because of poverty in the country).

Table C-6: Main reason for country choice

Main reason for country choice	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I like the culture of the country	7	6.5%	3	15.8%	21	28.8%	2	10.0%	33	15.0%
I qualify for the program	25	23.1%	3	15.8%	19	26.0%	6	30.0%	53	24.1%
I want a child with special needs	4	3.7%	3	15.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	7	3.2%
I want to adopt a child that is known to me and this is the country where the child lives	2	1.9%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	0	0.0%	3	1.4%
The age of the children in need of adoption	4	3.7%	0	0.0%	5	6.8%	0	0.0%	9	4.1%
The child would be of the same ethnic background as me and/or my partner	20	18.5%	0	0.0%	2	2.7%	2	10.0%	24	10.9%
The waiting period is shorter	10	9.3%	0	0.0%	4	5.5%	2	10.0%	16	7.3%
Other (please specify)	21	19.4%	8	42.1%	15	20.5%	5	25.0%	49	22.3%
Not stated	15	13.9%	2	10.5%	6	8.2%	3	15.0%	26	11.8%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Appendix C. Survey results

Age preference

More than half of all respondents (54.3%) indicated a preference for adopting a child under 3 years old (*Table B-7*).

Table C-7: Preferred age of adoptive child

Preferred age of adoptive child	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Under 3 years old	69	52.7%	8	32.0%	47	60.3%	15	68.2%	139	54.3%
3 years to under 7 years	34	26.0%	10	40.0%	16	20.5%	3	13.6%	63	24.6%
7 years to under 10 years	5	3.8%	2	8.0%	7	9.0%	0	0.0%	14	5.5%
Older than 10 years	2	1.5%	1	4.0%	1	1.3%	0	0.0%	4	1.6%
No age preference	8	6.1%	3	12.0%	0	0.0%	1	4.5%	12	4.7%
Not stated	13	9.9%	1	4.0%	7	9.0%	3	13.6%	24	9.4%
Total	131	100%	25	100%	78	100%	22	100%	256	100%

* Multiple responses permitted, hence total exceed 220.

Preferred number of children

Overall, the majority of respondents (51.8%) indicated a preference for adopting a single child (*Table B-8*).

Among those currently wanting to adopt, first-time ICA parents were interested in either a single child (42.6%) or a sibling group of two (26.9%). While respondents who wanted to adopt another child through ICA processes were also largely one-child oriented (31.6%), more than one in four of this group (26.3%) indicated they had no preference.

Almost three-quarters of those who had already adopted a child (71.2%) had adopted one child.

Table C-8: Preferred number of adoptive children

Preferred number of adoptive children	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Single child	46	42.6%	6	31.6%	52	71.2%	10	50.0%	114	51.8%
Sibling group of two	29	26.9%	2	10.5%	3	4.1%	1	5.0%	35	15.9%
Sibling group of three or more	1	0.9%	2	10.5%	-	-	-	-	3	1.4%
No preference	18	16.7%	5	26.3%	-	-	5	25.0%	28	12.7%
Other	1	0.9%	2	10.5%	12	16.4%	1	5.0%	16	7.3%
Not stated	13	12.0%	2	10.5%	6	8.2%	3	15.0%	24	10.9%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

Appendix C. Survey results

Children with special needs

Receptiveness to the adoption of children with special needs was explored from two perspectives:

- Whether respondents had *considered* adopting of a child with special needs
- Whether respondents were willing to adopt a child with special needs or had already adopted a child with special needs.

Overall, more than half of the respondents (55.0%, 121/220) had either considered or were open to the option of adopting a child with special needs, while almost one in three respondents (32.7%) stated they had not considered this option (Table B-9).

Table C-9: Considered adopting a child with special needs

Considered adopting a child with special needs	Wanting to adopt				Post adoption		Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%						
Yes	35	34.0%	12	63.2%	36	49.3%	8	40.0%	91	41.4%
Open to the option	25	24.3%	5	26.3%	-	0.0%	-	-	30	13.6%
Subtotal	60	58.3%	17	89.5%	36	49.3%	8	40.0%	121	55.0%
No	33	32.0%	-	-	30	41.1%	9	45.0%	72	32.7%
Not stated	15	9.7%	2	10.5%	7	9.6%	3	15.0%	27	12.3%
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	73	100.0%	20	100.0%	220	100.0%

However, considering adopting a child with special needs did not always translate into a willingness to adopt a child with special needs, with only 39.7% (29/73) those who had previously adopted a child indicating that they had adopted a child with special needs.

Among the remaining 147 parental respondents, a marginal drop was evident in the proportion *open to the option* and those who were *willing to adopt a child with special needs* among those wanting to adopt for the first time those who were wanting to adopt additional children (from 58.3% to 54.7%, and from 89.5% to 84.2% respectively). The most marked drop was evident among those who did not continue (from 40.0% to 25.0%) (Table B-10).

Table C-10: Willingness to adopt a child with special needs

Willingness to adopt a child with special needs	Wanting to adopt				Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%				
Yes	22	20.4%	9	47.4%	-	0.0%	31	21.1%
Open to the option	37	34.3%	7	36.8%	5	25.0%	49	33.3%
Subtotal	59	54.7%	16	84.2%	5	25.0%	80	54.4%
No	36	33.3%	1	5.3%	12	60.0%	49	33.3%
Not stated	13	12.0%	2	10.5%	3	15.0%	18	12.2%

Appendix C. Survey results

Willingness to adopt a child with special needs	Wanting to adopt				Did not continue		Total	
	First time		Repeat		n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%				
Total	108	100.0%	19	100.0%	20	100.0%	147	100.0%

Of those who had previously adopted a child, 39.7% reported that they had adopted a child with special needs.

A.12. In-depth follow-up interviews with survey respondents

In-depth interviews were undertaken with 25 respondents to the online survey who had indicated that they had used the IAA service and were happy to be contacted for a more detailed discussion. The in-depth interviews were carried out via teleconference where possible and via email if the interviewee was living outside of Australia or this method was requested. The majority of interviewees were people considering ICA, 21 (77.7%) with the remainder from other groups as detailed in (Table C-11). Two interviewees are categorised into two groups, one interviewee who was considering ICA and was an adoptive parent, and one interviewee who was considering ICA and local adoption, resulting in a total of 27 responses.

Table C-11: Interviewees' stage in the ICA process

Grouping	Number of respondents
Considering ICA	21
Considering local adoption	1
Considering expat adoption	1
ICA adoptive parent	2
Expat adoptive parents	1
Adoptee	1
Total	27

While the reasons for using the IAA service varied, the majority of interviewees were seeking general information on ICA. The reasons are detailed in Table B-12. Three of the interviewees had more than one reason for using the service, resulting in a total of 28 responses.

Table C-12: Interviewees' reasons for using IAA service

Reason	Number of interviewees
Information on ICA	22
Information on expat adoption	1
Information on local adoption	1
Immigration support	2
Post-adoption support	2
Total	28*

Appendix C. Survey results

* Three of the interviewees had more than one reason for using the service, resulting in a total of 28 responses.

All interviewees expected accurate and up to date information in a timely manner to inform and guide them through the adoption and immigration processes, and to provide them with post-adoption services.

Eight of the 25 interviewees received a referral, with six respondents saying they found the referral useful.

Reasons IAA is not meeting expectations

The interviewees who indicated that the service did not meet their expectations expressed frustration with the following, some of which were outside the scope of the IAA service:

- The inability:
 - To adopt from countries of their choice⁶
 - To adopt while they are living outside of Australia
 - Of the IAA to influence the STCA processes
 - To secure Australian citizenship for expatriate adoptees while they are living outside of Australia
- The 'run around' to get information and approval between the STCAs and IAA.

The responses to the question on whether the interviewees received the information they needed are aligned with their expectations and whether they were met. The interviewees who did not receive the information they needed were the same cohort who did not have their expectations met.

One interviewee, who indicated that the IAA staff did not listen, wanted to adopt a child from a non-partner country. This interviewee expressed tremendous frustration and could not understand why Australians could not adopt from a non-partner country.

Interviewees were asked whether the IAA service made their experiences of the ICA process positive. All but two respondents answered affirmatively. Of the two negative responses, one related to an intended adoption from a non-partner country and the other related to an interviewee who wanted to obtain Australian citizenship for adoptees while living overseas. Again, these latter responses reflect issues that were outside the scope of the service.

Several interviewees did not respond to questions about whether the IAA staff listened, whether the service had a positive impact on their ICA experience or whether there were any gaps in the IAA service. The same cohort did not respond to these three questions.

What difference has the IAA made to the ICA experience?

There were four responses to this question with three of them indicating that it has improved their access to information on ICA. The fourth response expressed disappointment with the IAA service, claiming it has *“added more uncertainty to the process and was a big waste of money”*.

⁶ People cannot adopt from the country of their choice as Australia must have a program with the country to ensure that the Hague Convention is met and that 'the best interests of the child' remain foremost in all adoptions undertaken.

Appendix C. Survey results

Other comments

At the conclusion of the in-depth interview, interviewees were invited to provide any further comments. Most interviewees used the opportunity to suggest improvements, voice their frustrations and disappointment, and share their stories. Where pertinent, these comments have been included in previous sections of this report. The following comments have not been included earlier in the report, some of which are out of the control of IAA:

- Ten interviewees said the ICA process could be simpler, with one respondent raising strong objection to the personal nature of the control that the STCA can impose on people considering or going through the process of ICA
- Three respondents complimented the IAA service and indicated that they were happy and impressed with the whole service
- The requirement to be in a stable traditional male/female relationship was commented on as being unfair by two respondents
- The cost of ICA was considered too expensive by two respondents.

Those who have not used the service

In-depth consultations were conducted with 10 survey respondents who had indicated that they had not used the IAA service and provided consent to be contacted for a more detailed discussion. The original aim was to speak with 25 people but thematic saturation was reached much earlier than this. The in-depth consultations were carried out by telephone and included people from different stages of the ICA process.

- Three respondents were thinking about/wanting to adopt
- Three respondents had decided against adoption
- One had already adopted a child, and was seeking to adopt again
- Three were at the post adoption stage

Most (80%) of respondents were female, all respondents were married, 90% were Australian citizens (10% unknown) and 90% were non-Indigenous (10% unknown). Half of the respondents were aged between 46 and 55, 40% were aged 30-45 and the age of one person was unknown. Half of the respondents were not from a CALD background, 40% indicated that they were and 10% was not stated

The major reason cited for not using the IAA service was that it did not exist when respondents commenced the ICA process. The breakdown of interviewees' reasons is detailed in *Table B-14*.

Table C-13: Interviewees' reasons for not using the IAA service

Reason	Number of interviewees
IAA did not exist	5
I did not know about it	2
I had no need to use it	1
IAA does not assist people living overseas	1

Appendix C. Survey results

Reason	Number of interviewees
Not stated	1
Total	10

Two of the three respondents who indicated that they had decided not to continue with ICA had instead decided to apply for permanent foster care, and one had decided against ICA as they were unable to adopt from their preferred country.

In response to the hypothetical question on whether the service could have assisted them in making decisions, of the people who answered (n=5): one interviewee said the service could not have assisted as it has no power to influence the states, another indicated that the service could have assisted in the decision-making process and three people said it may have assisted them.

Interviewees were asked if they thought the IAA service could have supported them through the adoption process. Four people replied in the affirmative, one said no and one was undecided.

Other comments

Interviewees were given the opportunity to provide further comments at the conclusion of the in-depth interviews. Most respondents used the opportunity to suggest improvements, voice their frustrations and disappointment, and share their stories. Where appropriate the comments have been included under the previous discussion sections. The following comments were also provided:

"[The ICA system] should be more like the fostering system – based on the assumption that people are good and are here to help"

"There is no recourse – you can't speak out. I can't understand why they would want to put people into the system when they can't deliver. People in government have no long-term history. The process as promised is different from reality. If we'd known more information we might have made different decisions but the information always changes. In the past, you could be charged for making comments to the media about adoption processes."

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