

# Intercountry adoptions – special needs

[Adoptions Australia 2019-20](#) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021)

## Level of need

Special needs in the Australian adoption context can be explored through the perceived level of need of an adoptee and their adoptive family, compared with what would be expected for a family with an average, non-adopted child of similar age in the general population. ‘Level of need’ can be conceptualised on a continuum—from those adoptees and their families who do not require any additional resources or support to those who require regular and more intensive additional resources and supports.

The level of need of intercountry adoptees who enter Australia is measured at allocation (the time an adoptee was matched with their prospective adoptive parents) and 12 months after entering Australia (excluding adoptions for Western Australia for which these data were not available).

Tables 1 and 2, below, provide insight into the level of need of these adoptees.

**Table 1: Children who entered Australia in 2018–19, by their assessed level of need at allocation and 12 months after entering Australia**

Assessed level of need	At allocation		12 months after entering Australia	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
No additional care needs	7	21.9	10	31.3
Minor additional care needs	11	34.4	15	46.9
Moderate to substantial additional care needs	14	43.8	7	21.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes:

1. This table includes all Hague and Bilateral intercountry adoptions through partner countries who entered Australia in the financial year prior to the current reporting period.
2. ‘Level of need’ is based on the assessment information available 12 months after the child entered Australia. Where available assessment information indicates different levels of need, preference is given to the most recent assessment information.
3. Excludes adoptions from Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, which were unable to report on the level of need.

Source: AIHW Adoptions Australia data collection.

**Table 2: Children who entered Australia in 2018–19, by assessed level of need 12 months later and type of intercountry adoption program<sup>(a)</sup>**

Assessed level of need	Placements under adoption quotas		Placements not under adoption quotas		Placements through alternative referral programs	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
No additional care needs	4	22.2	5	55.6	—	..
Minor additional care needs	13	72.2	2	22.2	—	..
Moderate to substantial additional care needs	1	5.6	2	22.2	4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Excludes adoptions from Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory for which these data were not available.

Notes:

1. This table includes all Hague and bilateral intercountry adoptions through partner countries who entered Australia in the financial year before the current reporting period.
2. ‘Level of need’ is based on the assessment information available 12 months after the child entered Australia. Where available assessment information shows different levels of need, preference was given to the most recent assessment information.
3. The type of intercountry adoption program refers to the program through which the child placement occurred.

Source: AIHW Adoptions Australia data collection.

# Glossary

**special needs:** Special needs in the Australian adoption context is defined as the level of resources or support services required by the adoptee and/or their adoptive family to foster healthy development and wellbeing, to support positive family functioning, and to prevent adoption disruption. Special needs are looked at through a continuum of level of need that is broken down into the following categories: **no additional care needs**, **minor additional care needs**, and **moderate to substantial additional care needs**.

**no additional care needs (special needs):** Children who regularly require a level of personal, emotional, and physical care that is consistent with what would be expected for their age group. On a day-to-day basis, the resources and supports for the child and their family are essentially the same as would be expected for a family with an average, non-adopted child of similar age in the general population.

**minor additional care needs (special needs):** Children who generally require a level of personal, emotional, and physical care that is consistent with what would be expected for their age group. On most occasions, the resources and supports for the child and their family are comparable to those expected for a family with an average, non-adopted child of similar age in the general population, but the child's adoption history results in short-term or irregular periods where additional resources and supports are required for the child and/or their family.

**moderate to substantial additional care needs (special needs):** Children who regularly require a level of personal, emotional, and/or physical care that is beyond what would be expected for their age group. On a regular and frequent basis, the resources and supports for the child and their family are greater than those expected for a family with an average, non-adopted child of similar age in the general population. Areas of additional need might include, but are not limited to:

- children (on an ongoing basis): requiring abnormal amounts of attention and affection, or high levels of routine and structure due to trauma/attachment issues; displaying (on an ongoing basis) aggressive behaviours, enuresis, and encopresis; stealing; or sleeping difficulties
- children (beyond usual age expectations) requiring assistance with dressing, bathing, toileting, feeding, mobility
- regular physical therapy
- regular medication for a diagnosed condition that requires skill and training to administer, or is needed to allow significantly improved day-to-day functioning
- medical need for special dietary restrictions
- frequent hospital or specialist appointments
- ongoing high support special education programs.