

5. Participants from birth to before starting school: childcare

5.1 Key findings

Box 5.1: Key findings for participants from birth to before starting school: childcare

- Based on the SF questionnaire, the percentage of parents/carers who used childcare for children under 5 was 66%. This is significantly lower than the age-adjusted population benchmark estimated using the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)¹⁷ survey (76%).
- The most common form of childcare was centre-based childcare (used by 85% of those who used childcare), followed by a relative who doesn't live with the family (26%).
- Compared to the general population, parents/carers of NDIS participants are more likely to use all forms of child care while not at work. This may be due to parents/carers using childcare in order to have a break.
- Parents/carers of NDIS participants are found to be more likely to have no difficulties in accessing childcare compared to parents/carers in the general population: 53% said they had no difficulty finding good quality childcare compared to 43% for HILDA; 52% said they had no difficulty finding the right person to care for their child compared to 39% for HILDA; and 55% said they had no difficulty finding childcare at short notice compared to 25% for HILDA. However, NDIS participants are slightly more likely to face a lot of difficulties finding good quality childcare (17% versus 13%) and finding the right person to care for their child (15% versus 13%).
- The results of the regression analysis suggest that parents/carers of children with disabilities that have relatively higher needs are less likely to use childcare. This relationship may reflect a lack of training or resources available for childcare providers to support children with high needs disabilities.
- There was a significant positive relationship between use of specialist services and use of childcare.
- Participation in the community and the ability to make friends were found to be positively correlated with childcare use. Parents/carers may feel more comfortable sending their child to childcare once the child has developed necessary social skills through interactions with friends or in the community. On the other hand, by fostering better social skills, childcare usage may be the cause rather than the effect of increased community participation and improved ability to make friends.

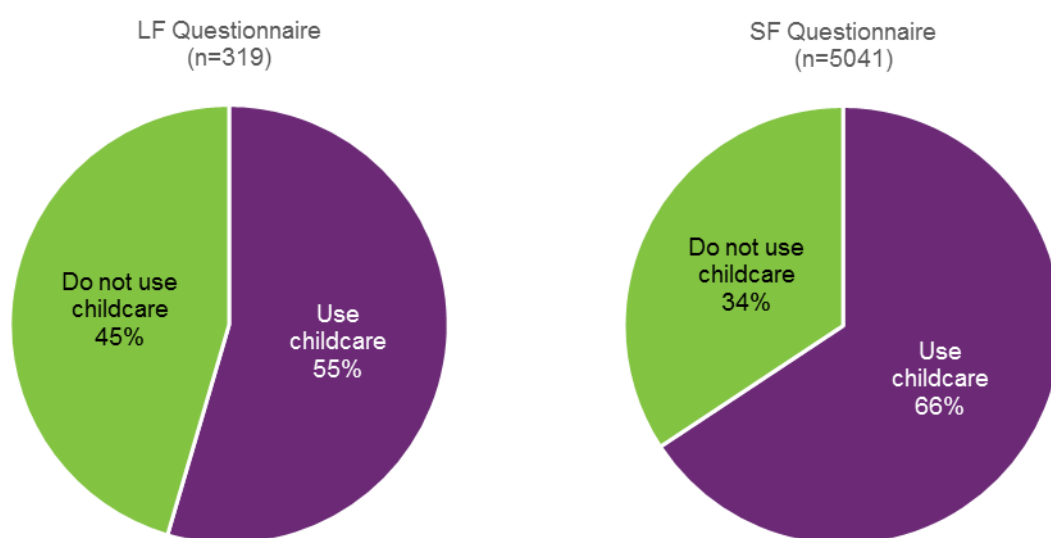
¹⁷ <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>

5.2 Background and overall results

Childcare forms part of the mainstream early childhood support system for children with disabilities and their families and carers. The inclusion of children with disabilities in childcare services can lead to improved social and personal development for children, and offers respite for families and carers to maintain their wellbeing, and participate in the workforce and/or community¹⁸.

In the Social, Community and Civic Participation domain of the LF questionnaire and the SF questionnaire, the parents and carers of participants aged 0 to before starting school are asked 'Do you use any form of childcare?' The percentage of parents/carers who reported that they were using childcare at the time of their child's baseline plan¹⁹ is illustrated in Figure 5.1 for each version of the questionnaire.

Figure 5.1 Childcare usage at baseline plan, by questionnaire type



The use of childcare by the cohort of parents and carers who complete the LF questionnaire may not be representative of childcare usage by the general NDIS population, as captured in the SF questionnaire. In particular, given the LF questionnaire is conducted by phone during office hours, it may be biased towards parents or carers who spend more time in the home e.g. do not have full time paid work. The LF questionnaire also has a lower proportion of participants located in NSW (42% for SF, 27% for LF)²⁰ and childcare usage at baseline is found to be significantly higher in NSW compared to other States/Territories (see Section 5.4).

¹⁸ Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities. 2009. Families' experience of childcare services for their children with a disability or additional needs p6

¹⁹ For SF questionnaire, only includes participants with baseline plans from 18 September 2017 onwards due to a system issue with the SF questionnaire prior to this date.

²⁰ See Appendix B.

5.3 Comparison to population benchmark

The usage of childcare services by parents and carers of NDIS participants can be compared to the general population using the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia ('HILDA') Survey. The HILDA Survey is a longitudinal study that collects information from over 17,000 Australian households over the course of their lifetime²¹. The childcare questions in the LF questionnaire and SF questionnaire have been designed to be analogous to the HILDA Survey.

The HILDA Survey reports on childcare usage for children who have not yet attended school, where this is determined as children aged less than 5 years old. To compare the experience of NDIS participants on a like-for-like basis, only participants aged less than 5 years old at the time of their baseline plan have been included in the benchmark comparison. The age distributions of the NDIS and HILDA survey cohorts are illustrated in Figure 5.2. NDIS participants are much more concentrated at the older ages, whereas the HILDA Survey is more uniformly distributed across age groups. Given that age has a significant impact on usage of childcare (see Section 5.4), an age-adjusted benchmark has been calculated for the HILDA Survey reflecting the age distribution of the SF questionnaire.

Figure 5.2 Age distribution of NDIS and HILDA survey cohorts

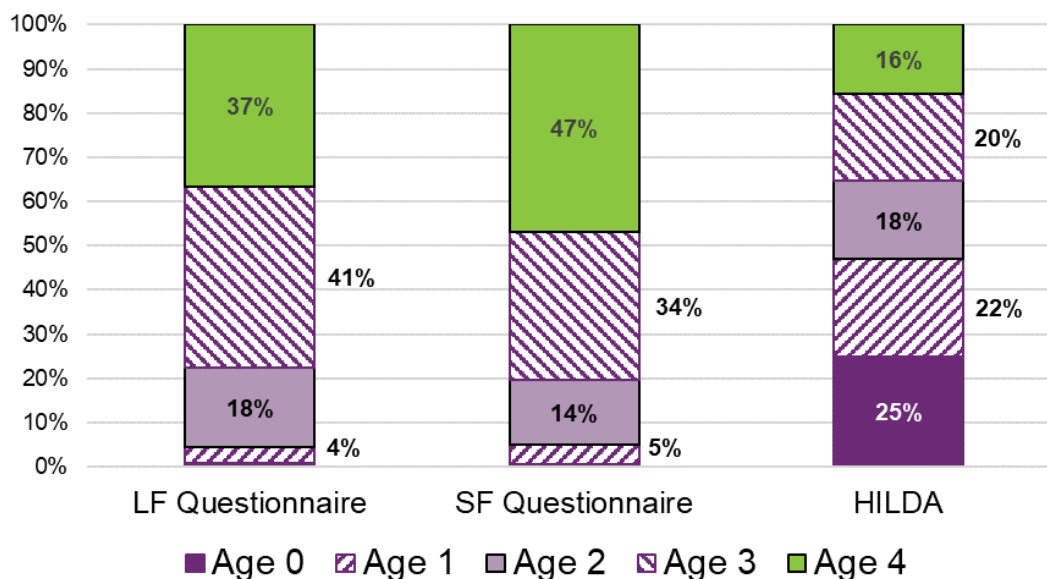


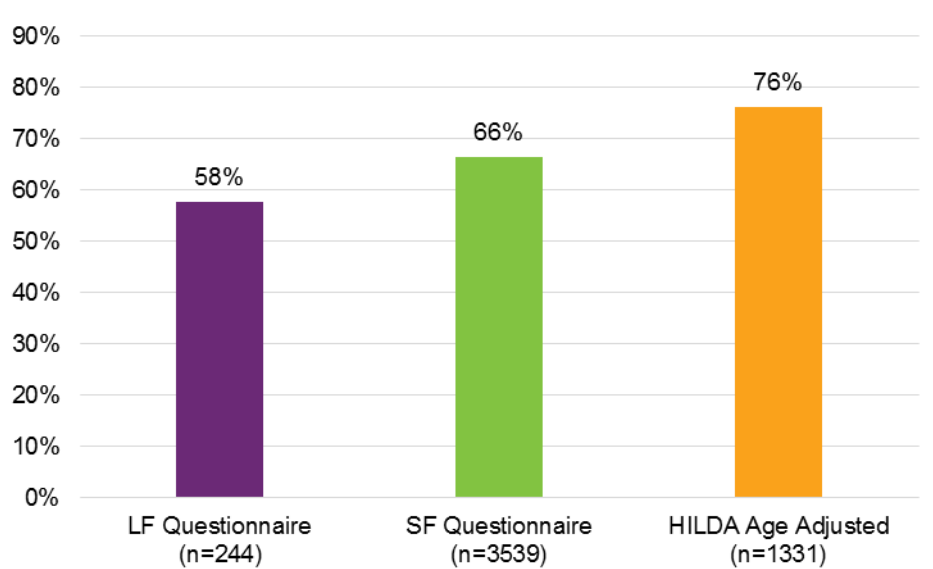
Figure 5.3 illustrates the percentage of parents and carers who use childcare according to each survey. Compared to results without age-adjustment, the difference in reported childcare usage reduces when comparing the SF questionnaire and the age-adjusted HILDA Survey, but the SF questionnaire response rate still remains significantly lower²². This

²¹ HILDA Survey website <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>

²² Chi-square test of independence, $p < 0.0001$

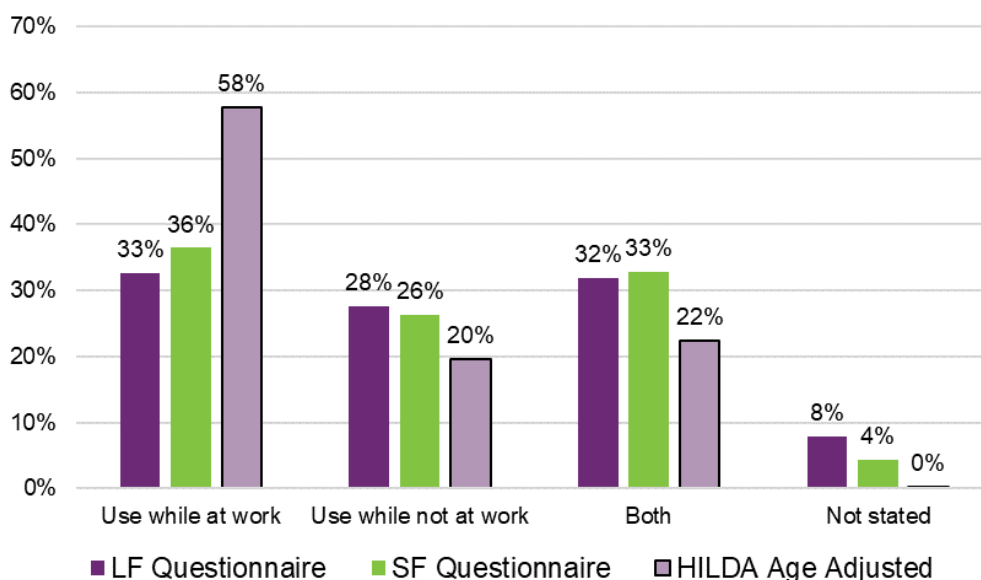
suggests that, on average, the parents/carers of NDIS participants are accessing childcare at a lower rate than the general population.

Figure 5.3 Percentage of parents/carers of participants aged under 5 who use childcare, comparison to population benchmark



In each survey, parents and carers who report that they use childcare are also asked to specify the types of childcare they used, and whether it was used while they were at work, while they were not at work, or both. Figure 5.4 shows when parents and carers use childcare according to each survey.

Figure 5.4 When childcare is used, comparison to population benchmark



Parents and carers of NDIS participants are more likely to use childcare while not at work than the general population, as represented by the age-adjusted HILDA Survey. This may reflect that the parents and carers of NDIS participants are less likely to be employed or are working fewer hours than the general population. In addition, childcare plays an important role in allowing parents and carers of children with disabilities to have a break, regardless of whether the parent or carer is currently employed.

Figure 5.5 compares the types of childcare used while the parent/carer is at work and Figure 5.6 shows the types of childcare used while the parent/carer is not at work.

Figure 5.5 Types of childcare used while at work, comparison to population benchmark

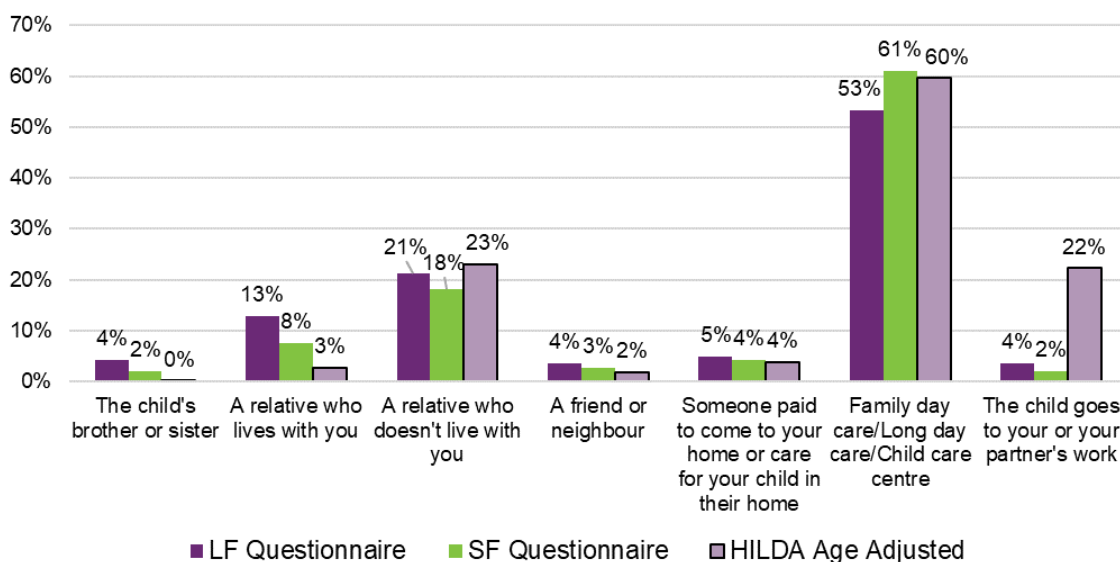
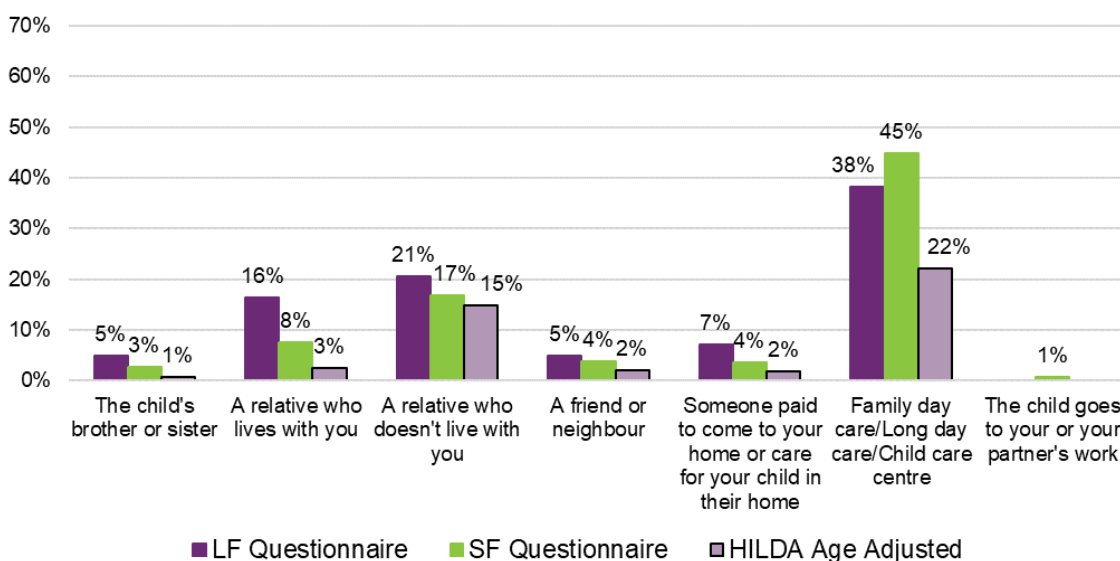


Figure 5.6 Types of childcare used while not at work, comparison to population benchmark



The most common form of childcare across all surveys is family day care, long day care or any other care at a child care centre, followed by a relative who doesn't live with the family (paid or unpaid). Parents and carers of NDIS participants are considerably more likely to use centre-based childcare while not at work compared to the general population, potentially to allow them to have a break. Parents/carers in the LF questionnaire were also found to be more likely to use informal childcare (e.g. siblings, other relatives, friends or neighbours) compared to parents/carers in the SF questionnaire and the HILDA Survey, but this may again reflect the demographic profile of the LF questionnaire cohort.

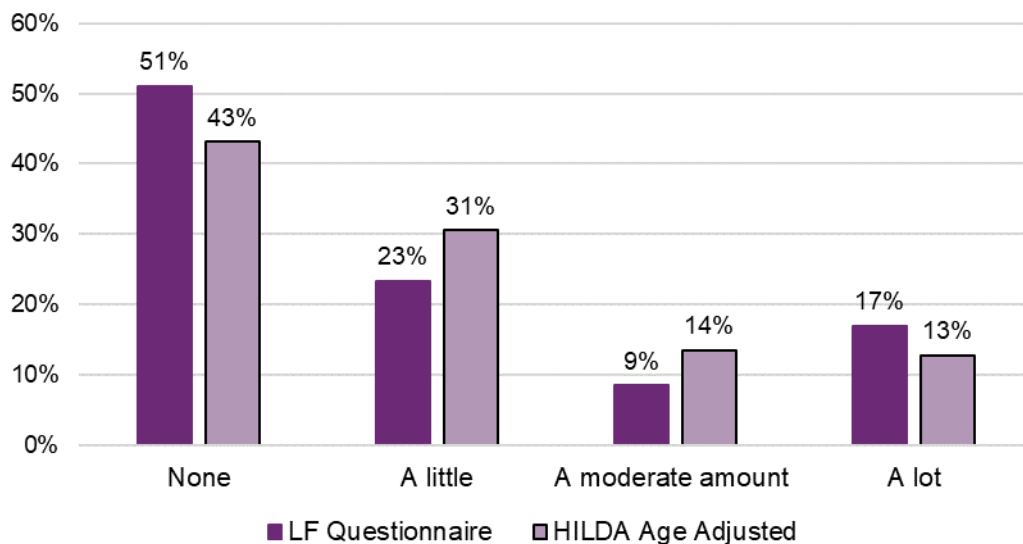
The percentage of HILDA Survey respondents who use childcare at work is considerably larger compared to NDIS participants, across both the LF and SF questionnaires. Given the size of the difference, this is likely due to an inconsistency in interpretation between the two surveys rather than a fundamental difference in the types of childcare used²³.

There are some additional questions included in the LF questionnaire regarding difficulties accessing childcare that also appear in the HILDA Survey. These questions are:

1. 'How much difficulty did you have in finding good quality childcare?'
2. 'How much difficulty did you have in finding the right person to take care of your child?'
3. 'How much difficulty did you have in finding childcare at short notice?'

Figure 5.7, Figure 5.8, and Figure 5.9 compare the responses in the LF questionnaire to the age-adjusted HILDA Survey.

Figure 5.7 Difficulties finding good quality childcare, comparison to population benchmark



²³ For the HILDA Survey, respondents are asked 'While you (and your partner) are working, who looks after the child?' and one of the multi choice options is 'Me or my partner'. This is assumed to correspond to using childcare at the workplace as the question specifies that both the respondent and their partner is at work, but is likely interpreted differently in practice to include one partner staying home with the child

Figure 5.8 Difficulties finding the right person to care for child, comparison to population benchmark

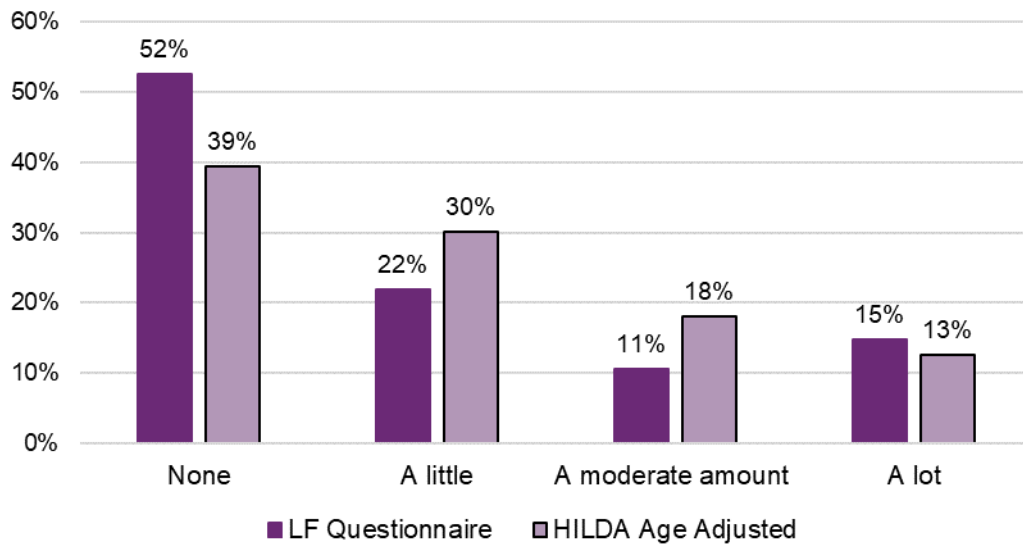
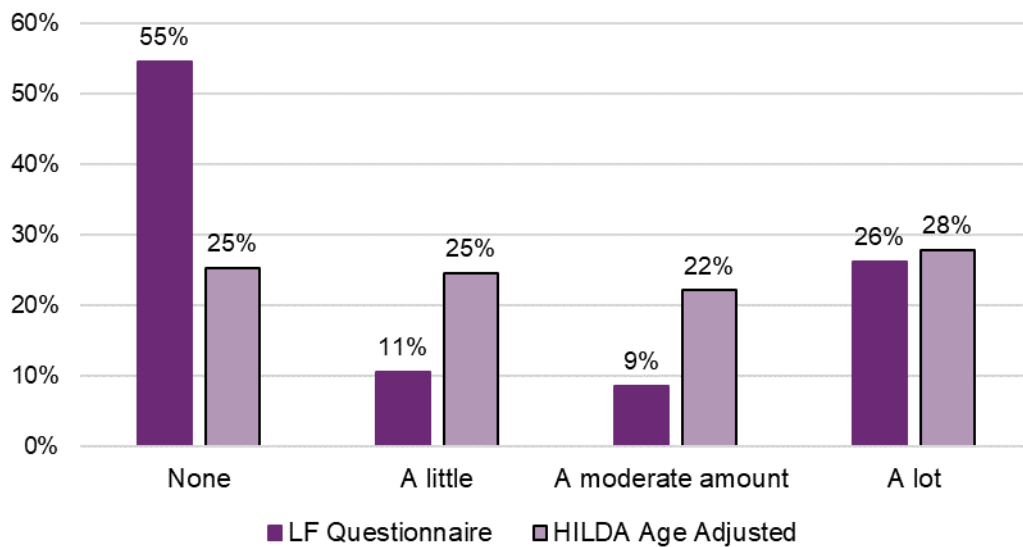


Figure 5.9 Difficulties finding childcare at short notice, comparison to population benchmark



Parents and carers of NDIS participants who completed the LF questionnaire are found to be more likely to have no difficulties in accessing childcare compared to parents and carers in the general population, particularly with regards to finding childcare at short notice (55% versus 25%). Whilst they are slightly more likely to face a lot of difficulties finding good quality childcare (17% versus 13%) and finding the right person to care for their child (15% versus 13%), they are slightly less likely to face a lot of difficulties finding childcare at short notice (26% versus 28%).











5.4 Key drivers of childcare usage at baseline

The key drivers of whether participants aged 0 to before starting school are in childcare prior to entering the Scheme (that is, at baseline) have been analysed using a multiple logistic

regression analysis on the SF questionnaire cohort. The regression analysis models a binary response (dependent) variable of one if the parent or carer responds at baseline that they use childcare and zero otherwise. A stepwise regression approach is used to determine the statistically significant predictors from a number of different variables expected to influence the desire and/or ability of a parent or carer to use childcare prior to entering the Scheme.

Table 5.1 outlines the variables that were found to have a significant relationship to usage of childcare at baseline, based on the multiple logistic regression analysis. The direction of the relationship is also given.

Table 5.1 Key drivers of usage of childcare at baseline

Variable	Relationship
Entry age	 0 to 4  5 to 6
Level of function	 with increasing score
Annualised cost of plan is greater than 20k	
Streaming type is intensive or super intensive	
Participant is male	
Participant lives in NSW	
Participant uses specialist services at baseline plan	
Participates in age appropriate community, cultural or religious activities at baseline plan	
Participant can make friends with people outside the family at baseline plan	

Childcare usage is found to be lower when the child participant has any of the following characteristics: a lower level of function²⁴, higher annualised plan costs, or streamed as intensive or super intensive. These results suggest that parents/carers of children with disabilities that have relatively higher needs are less likely to use childcare. This relationship may reflect a lack of training or resources available for childcare providers to support children with high needs disabilities, both in formal and informal settings. Additional barriers to the usage of formal childcare for high needs participants include low expectations, active discrimination, and the costs of formal childcare services for parents and carers who may already face large out-of-pocket costs to support their child²⁵.

Research has shown that partnerships between early childhood specialists and mainstream services can improve the ability of mainstream programs to meet the child's needs, and can lead to meaningful inclusion for the child if specialist services are well-integrated into the

²⁴ Level of function is on a scale of 1 (highest level of function) to 15 (lowest level of function) so as the score increases, the participant has a lower level of function

²⁵ Productivity Commission Inquiry Report. 2014. Childcare and Early Childhood Learning pp 518.

mainstream setting²⁶. The positive relationship between usage of specialist services and usage of childcare by parents and carers may suggest that some specialist service providers are effectively working with childcare providers to support children with disabilities. Furthermore, the use of specialist services may improve the confidence of both the parent/carer and the child to engage with childcare outside of the immediate parent or carer.

A positive relationship is also found between childcare usage and parents/carers who report that their child is involved in the community or can make friends with people outside the family. This may reflect factors that drive the use of childcare, for example parent/carers may be more comfortable using childcare once their child's social skills are more developed. Alternatively, it may be an outcome of childcare usage whereby a child who attends childcare is able to build social skills, and this improves their ability to make friends and be involved in the community. As longitudinal data is collected on childcare from the SF questionnaire, the impact of childcare usage on reported outcomes will be analysed to gain more insight into this relationship.

There are additional factors related to the parent or carer that would be expected to influence the use of childcare, for example the number of hours the parent or carer is working. There is a plan to connect the responses from the family and carer surveys to the participant surveys in order to improve the analysis of childcare usage in the future.

²⁶ Noah's Ark Incorporated. 2006. Inclusion in Children's Services: Next Steps pp 17-21.