

4 Out-of-home care

Overview

Children who are placed in out-of-home care

Out-of-home care is one of a range of services provided to children who are in need of care and protection, and their families. This type of service assists and supports children and young people in a variety of care arrangements other than with their parents. These arrangements include foster care, placements with relatives or kin, and residential care. In most jurisdictions, children are placed in out-of-home care in conjunction with being placed on a care and protection orders.

Some children are placed in out-of-home care because they were the subjects of child protection substantiations and require more protective environments. Other situations in which a child may be placed in out-of-home care include where parents are incapable of providing adequate care for the child, or where there is family conflict and time out is needed. There are no national data available, however, on the reasons why children are placed in out-of-home care.

The current emphasis in policy and practice is to maintain children with their families wherever possible. Where children, for various reasons, need to be placed in out-of-home care, the practice is to attempt to reunify children with their families. There are specialist family preservation services in many jurisdictions that seek to prevent the separation of children from their families as a result of child protection concerns; or to reunify families where separation has already occurred. In 1999–00, 35 family preservation programs and subprograms were operating across Australia, comprising two in New South Wales, 18 in Victoria, four in Queensland, three in Western Australia, seven in South Australia and one in Tasmania. The AIHW collected some preliminary data on these services in 1999–00 and this data will be further developed over the next few years.

In Australia, most children who are placed in out-of-home care are eventually reunited with their families (Forwood & Carver 1999:740). If it is necessary to remove a child from his or her family, then placement within the wider family or community is preferred, particularly in the case of Indigenous children.

Respite care is a form of out-of-home care that is used to provide short-term accommodation for children whose parents are ill or unable to care for them on a temporary basis. Not all jurisdictions can identify which children in out-of-home care are in respite care.

As with the majority of child welfare services, States and Territories are responsible for funding out-of-home care. Non-government organisations are widely used, however, to provide services in this area.

Out-of-home care and Court orders

Children can be placed in out-of-home care voluntarily or through some type of court order. Such orders include care and protection orders, including formal administrative arrangements, and other legal orders, such as juvenile justice orders (see Chapter 3).

- In the Northern Territory, all children in out-of-home care are on court orders or other authority.
- In Western Australia, most children in out-of-home care are on orders some children are on interim arrangements pending the issuing of an order, and some are under voluntary arrangements.
- Queensland was only able to provide data on children in out-of-home care who were on orders or remanded in temporary custody awaiting the outcomes of applications for orders.

In the other jurisdictions, children in out-of-home care can be placed on a range of different orders or authorities (for example, in South Australia children needing emergency respite care will often be placed in out-of-home care on the authority of their guardians). Although a child may be in out-of-home care in conjunction with being on an order, the order does not necessarily specify where the child must reside or that the child be placed in care.

Scope and coverage of out-of-home care data collection

For the purposes of this collection, 'out-of-home care' is defined as out-of-home overnight care for children and young people under 18 years of age, where the State or Territory makes a financial payment. This includes placements with relatives (other than parents), but does not include placements made in disability services, medical or psychiatric services, juvenile justice facilities, overnight childcare services or supported accommodation assistance placements. The data exclude children in unfunded placements and also children living with parents where the State makes a financial payment.

Types of placements

Children in out-of-home care can be placed in a variety of living arrangements or placement types. In this collection, the following categories have been used.

- Home-based care—where placement is in the home of a carer who is reimbursed for expenses incurred in caring for the child. This category of placements is further divided into:
 - relative/kinship care where the caregiver is a family member or a person with a pre-existing relationship to the child;
 - foster or community care;
 - other home-based arrangements.
- Facility-based care—where placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placements for children and where there are paid staff. This category includes facilities where there are rostered staff, where there is a live-in carer (including family group homes), where staff are off-site (for example, a lead tenant or supported residence arrangement), as well as other facility-based arrangements.

- Independent living—where children are living independently, such as those in private boarding arrangements.
- Other—where the placement type does not fit into the above categories or is unknown.

State and Territory differences

There are some differences between the States and Territories in the scope and coverage of out-of-home care data.

- The data from Victoria include children on permanent care orders, since the State makes an ongoing payment for the care of these children.
- The data from Queensland exclude children in emergency overnight care for protective reasons where the caregiver is paid from emergency care funds.

Data and analysis

Data on children admitted to out-of-home care were collected for the first time this year. Most other data relate to children who were in out-of-home care for the night of 30 June 2000, unless otherwise stated. Australian totals have been provided where possible, although some States and Territories were not able to provide data for all tables.

Children admitted to out-of-home care

Data on children admitted to out-of-home care were available from six jurisdictions. There were 8,216 children admitted to out-of-home care in Australia, excluding Victoria and the Northern Territory (Table 4.1). New South Wales had the highest proportion of younger children admitted to out-of-home care, with 46% aged under 5 years. In contrast Tasmania had the highest proportion of older children admitted, with 50% aged 10 years or over, including 23% aged 15–17 years.

The data on children discharged from out-of-home care require further development and will be included in next year's report.

Table 4.1: Children admitted to out-of-home care during 1999–00, by age for selected States and Territories

Age of child (years)	NSW	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT
Number						
<1	549	183	119	126	21	28
1–4	1,125	274	226	393	73	92
5–9	1,042	297	237	449	83	108
10–14	790	384	235	505	95	93
15–17	134	115	113	166	83	28
Unknown	42	—	—	1	—	7
Total	3,682	1,253	930	1,640	355	356
Per cent						
<1	15	15	13	8	6	8
1–4	31	22	24	24	21	26
5–9	29	24	25	27	23	31
10–14	22	31	25	31	27	27
15–17	4	9	12	10	23	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes

1. Victoria and the Northern Territory could not provide data on admissions to out-of-home care.
2. The table includes all children admitted to out-of-home care for the first time, as well as those children returning to care who had exited care more than two months previously. Children admitted to out-of-home care more than once during the year were only counted once.

Number of children in out-of-home care

At 30 June 2000 there were 16,923 children in out-of-home care in Australia (Table 4.2). This compares with 15,674 children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 1999. The number of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2000 was higher than at 30 June 1999 in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory.

The number of children in out-of-home care in Australia at 30 June has increased each year since the AIHW began collecting data in 1996. Between 1996 and 2000 the number of children in out-of-home care increased by 21%.

Table 4.2: Number of children aged 0–17 in out-of-home care, by State and Territory, at 30 June 1996–2000

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
1996	5,437	3,385	2,110 ^(a)	1,206	1,064	508	181	88	13,979
1997	5,486	3,393	2,211	1,050	1,193	461	173	111	14,078
1998	5,603	3,615	2,346	1,093	1,055	442	179	137	14,470
1999	6,359	3,581	2,613	1,192	1,045	533	174	177	15,674
2000	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923

- (a) The data exclude those children in out-of-home care who were not on a care and protection order.

Characteristics of children in out-of-home care

Most children (90%) who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2000 were in home-based care, that is, living with relatives or kin, with foster carers or in some other type of home-based care arrangement (Table 4.3). The high proportion of children in home-based care reflects the trends in recent decades of increased use of placements with relatives and kin or foster carers, and decreased use of placements in facility-based or residential care.

Table 4.3: Children in out-of-home care: type of placement by State and Territory, at 30 June 2000

Type of placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA ^(a)	SA ^(b)	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	Number								
Foster/community care	2,510	2,237	1,910	769	n.a.	193	130	121	n.a.
Relatives/kin	3,812	962	639	341	n.a.	220	51	26	n.a.
Other home-based care	—	141	—	—	n.a.	12	—	—	n.a.
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>6,322</i>	<i>3,340</i>	<i>2,549</i>	<i>1,110</i>	<i>1,095</i>	<i>425</i>	<i>181</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>15,169</i>
Facility-based care	306	521	85	175	36	68	18	13	1,222
Independent living	134	6	—	32	—	32	—	4	208
Other ^(c)	279	—	—	9	—	23	1	12	324
Total	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923
	Per cent								
Foster/community care	36	58	73	58	n.a.	35	65	69	n.a.
Relatives/kin	54	25	24	26	n.a.	40	26	15	n.a.
Other home-based care	—	4	—	—	n.a.	2	—	—	n.a.
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>90</i>
Facility-based care	4	13	3	13	3	12	9	7	7
Independent living	2	—	—	2	—	6	—	2	1
Other ^(c)	4	—	—	1	—	4	—	7	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) The data includes a small number of children who were placed with relatives who were not reimbursed.

(b) South Australia was unable to break down the number of children in home-based out-of-home care.

(c) 'Other' includes unknown living arrangements.

The proportion of children in out-of-home care who were living in facility-based care arrangements was 7% Australia-wide and ranged from 3% in South Australia and Queensland to 13% in Victoria and Western Australia. It should be noted that facility-based care includes family group homes that may have only 8–10 children living together and residential establishments with under 10 children and a 24-hour worker. The principle of maintaining sibling groups together can also result in placements in residential care, for example, in Western Australia priority is given to keeping siblings together, which sometimes results in periods of facility-based care for larger family groups.

Compared with other jurisdictions, Queensland had a high proportion of children placed in foster or community care (73%), and New South Wales had a relatively high proportion of children placed with relatives or kin (54%).

Age and sex

Around one-third (31%) of children in out-of-home care were aged 10–14 years. A further 29% were aged 5–9 years, 24% were aged under 5 years and 16% were aged 15–17 years (Table A1.9). Just over half (52%) of all children in out-of-home care were male, though females outnumbered males in the Australian Capital Territory (Table A1.10).

In all States and Territories for which data were available, children in facility-based care were older than children in home-based care (Table A1.11). For example, all children in facility-based care in South Australia were aged 10 years or over, with 56% aged 15 or over. There was only a small number of children in facility-based care who were aged under 5 years in all jurisdictions, with South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory having no children of this age in facility-based care.

Whether children were on an order

In the Northern Territory, all children in out-of-home care were on care and protection orders or authority. Queensland was only able to provide data on children on care and protection orders, those on youth justice orders and those in temporary custody awaiting the outcomes of applications for orders. In other jurisdictions, the proportion of children in out-of-home care who were on orders ranged from 64% in Tasmania to 94% in the Australian Capital Territory (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Children in out-of-home care: whether the child was on an order by selected States and Territories,^(a) at 30 June 2000

Whether the child was on an order	NSW	Vic ^(b)	Qld	WA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	Number							
On a care and protection order	6,411	3,285	2,630	937	331	169	176	13,939
On another type of order	—	25	4	—	19	19	—	67
<i>Total children on orders</i>	<i>6,411</i>	<i>3,310</i>	<i>2,634</i>	<i>937</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>188</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>14,006</i>
Not on an order	630	557	—	389	198	12	—	1,786
Total	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	548	200	176	15,792
On a care and protection order	91	85	100	71	60	85	100	88
On another type of order	—	1	—	—	3	10	—	—
<i>Total children on orders</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>89</i>
Not on an order	9	14	—	29	36	6	—	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) South Australia was unable to provide this data.

(b) Data from Victoria includes estimates for some data sources.

Length of time in placement

The proportion of children in Australia who had been in out-of-home care for 5 years or more at 30 June 2000 ranged from 11% in Victoria to 39% in South Australia (Table 4.5). Overall, 59% of children had been in out-of-home care for less than 2 years. The proportion who had been in care for less than 1 month ranged from 4% in Western Australia to 14% in Tasmania.

As noted, respite care refers to out-of-home care that is provided on a temporary basis for reasons other than child protection, for example when parents are ill or unable to care for the child for short periods of time. Most jurisdictions could not identify whether or not children in out-of-home care were in respite care. New South Wales and Victoria were able to identify which children were in respite care and these children were included in the 'less than 1 month' category. Of children who had been in out-of-home care for less than 1 month, 76% in New South Wales and 33% in Victoria were in respite care.

Table 4.5: Children in out-of-home care: length of time in continuous placement by State and Territory, at 30 June 2000

Time in continuous placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	Number								
< 1 month	936	403	164	55	135	74	13	19	1,799
1 month to < 6 months	835	911	537	161	207	178	43	25	2,897
6 months to < 1 year	794	559	358	154	103	75	24	46	2,113
1 year to < 2 years	1,186	595	493	207	149	67	27	28	2,752
2 years to < 5 years	1,862	646	583	314	72	60	55	37	3,629
5 years or more	1,424	382	499	427	429	94	38	21	3,314
Not stated/unknown	4	371	—	8	36	—	—	—	419
Total	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923
	Per cent								
< 1 month	13	12	6	4	12	14	7	11	11
1 month to < 6 months	12	26	20	12	19	32	22	14	18
6 months to < 1 year	11	16	14	12	9	14	12	26	13
1 year to < 2 years	17	17	19	16	14	12	14	16	17
2 years to < 5 years	26	18	22	24	7	11	28	21	22
5 years or more	20	11	19	32	39	17	19	12	20
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: In those jurisdictions where children in out-of-home care for respite reasons can be identified, they have been included in the 'less than 1 month category' (New South Wales (715 children) and Victoria (134 children)).

Rates of children in out-of-home care

There were 3.6 children per 1,000 aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care in Australia at 30 June 2000 (Table 4.6). This is slightly higher than the rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 1999 (3.3 per 1,000) (AIHW 2000).

The rates of children in out-of-home care varied by State and Territory and ranged from 2.6 per 1,000 in the Australian Capital Territory to 4.6 per 1,000 in Tasmania. The reasons for this variation are likely to include differences in the policies and practices of the community services departments in relation to out-of-home care, as well as variations in the availability

of appropriate care options for children who are regarded as being in need of this type of service.

Table 4.6: Children in out-of-home care: number and rate per 1,000 children aged 0–17 years by Indigenous status and State and Territory, at 30 June 2000

State/Territory	No. of children			Rate per 1,000 children			Indigenous: other Rate ratio
	Indigenous	Other children	Total	Indigenous	Other children	Total	
New South Wales	1,815	5,226	7,041	32.9	3.4	4.5	9.7:1
Victoria ^(a)	297	3,570	3,867	27.5	3.2	3.4	8.6:1
Queensland	592	2,042	2,634	11.0	2.4	2.9	4.6:1
Western Australia	420	906	1,326	15.4	2.0	2.8	7.7:1
South Australia	211	920	1,131	19.5	2.7	3.2	7.2:1
Tasmania	38	510	548	5.1	4.5	4.6	1.1:1
Australian Capital Territory	29	171	200	18.9	2.2	2.6	8.6:1
Northern Territory	94	82	176	3.9	2.3	3.0	1.7:1
Total	3,496	13,427	16,923	18.3	3.0	3.6	6.1:1

(a) The data for Indigenous children in Victoria are estimates.

Note: For details on the calculation of rates and the coding of Indigenous status, see Appendix 2.

Sources: ABS 1999a, b, c.

Indigenous children

At 30 June 2000 there were 3,496 Indigenous children in Australia in out-of-home care (Table 4.6). The rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2000 was 18.3 per 1,000, ranging from 3.9 per 1,000 in the Northern Territory to 32.9 per 1,000 in New South Wales.

In all jurisdictions there were higher rates of Indigenous children in out-of-home care than for other Australian children. In New South Wales, the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was over 9 times the rate for other children, and in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory it was over 8 times the rate. (The relatively small size of the Indigenous population in the Australian Capital Territory should be taken into account when interpreting these rates.) The difference between the rates for Indigenous children and other Australian children was lowest in Tasmania and the Northern Territory (Table 4.6).

Indigenous status of caregivers

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle outlines a preference for the placement of Indigenous children with other Indigenous people when they are placed outside their family (Lock 1997:50). The Principle has the following order of preference for the placement of Indigenous children:

- with the child's extended family;
- within the child's Indigenous community; and
- with other Indigenous people.

All jurisdictions have adopted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle either in legislation or policy. The impact of the Principle is reflected in the relatively high proportions of Indigenous children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives, although not all jurisdictions could provide these data. The proportion of Indigenous

children who were placed with either an Indigenous carer or a relative ranged from 80% in New South Wales to 42% in Tasmania (Table 4.7).

New South Wales had the highest proportion of Indigenous children placed with Indigenous relatives (55%). The relatively low proportion of Indigenous children who were placed with an Indigenous carer in Tasmania is probably related to the small size as well as the dispersion of the Indigenous population in that State.

Table 4.7: Indigenous children in out-of-home care: Indigenous status and relationship of carer, for selected States and Territories, at 30 June 2000

	NSW	Qld ^(a)	WA	Tas	ACT	NT
	Number					
Indigenous relative	999	138	169	4	7	28
Indigenous non-relative	462	188	135	3	11	26
Non-Indigenous relative	n.a. ^(b)	79	22	9	2	n.a. ^(c)
<i>Total Indigenous or relative</i>	<i>1,461</i>	<i>405</i>	<i>326</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>54</i>
Other	354	169	94	22	9	31
Unknown	—	—	—	—	—	9
Total	1,815	574	420	38	29	94
	Per cent					
Indigenous relative	55	24	40	11	24	33
Indigenous non-relative	25	33	32	8	38	31
Non-Indigenous relative	n.a.	14	5	24	7	n.a.
<i>Total Indigenous or relative</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>64</i>
Other	20	29	22	58	31	36
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) Data only include children in home-based out-of-home care.

(b) New South Wales could not identify whether children were placed with a non-Indigenous relative and these children were included in the 'other' category.

(c) The relationship of the caregiver to children placed with non-Indigenous caregivers was not available and these children were placed in the 'other' category.

Notes

1. Data were not available for Victoria and South Australia.
2. For details on coding of Indigenous status, see Appendix 2.