

# 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 cases, children in out-of-home care will also be on a care and protection order of some kind.

Some children are placed in out-of-home care because they were the subject of a child protection substantiation and require a more protective environment. 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 reunite 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 2000–01, there were at least 25 family preservation programs operating across Australia—5 in New South Wales, 3 in Queensland, 3 in Western Australia, 12 in South Australia and 1 in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. (Victoria was not able to provide data.) The national data on family preservation services 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 these services.

## 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). There is considerable variety between the jurisdictions:

- In the Northern Territory, all children in out-of-home care were on a court order or another legal authority.
- In Western Australia, most children in out-of-home care were on court orders; the remainder were on interim arrangements pending the issuing of an order or voluntary arrangements.
- In New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, 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 or 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. 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 includes:
  - 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; and
  - 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), and where staff are off-site (for example, a lead tenant or supported residence arrangement), as well as other facility-based arrangements.
- *Independent living* – such as 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. For example, the data from Victoria include children on permanent care orders, since the State makes an ongoing payment for the care of these children.

## Data and analysis

There are some data in this section on children admitted to out-of-home care during 2000–01 but most of the data relate to children who were in out-of-home care for the night of 30 June 2001. Australian totals have been provided where possible, although some States and Territories were not able to provide data for all tables.

## Admissions and discharges

In 2000–01 there were 12,030 children admitted to out-of-home care in Australia (Table 4.1). The number of children admitted to care was higher than in 1999–00 in New South Wales and Queensland, and lower in Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania (AIHW 2001b).

**Table 4.1: Children admitted to out-of-home care during 2000–01, by age, Australia**

Age (years)	NSW <sup>(a)</sup>	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>									
<1	607	292	153	131	127	20	11	22	1,363
1–4	1,310	666	303	201	369	46	74	74	3,043
5–9	1,268	767	344	230	467	50	83	62	3,271
10–14	1,105	844	412	236	465	64	64	78	3,268
15–17	173	428	110	87	171	6	16	11	1,002
Unknown	79	—	—	—	—	—	3	1	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,542</b>	<b>2,997</b>	<b>1,322</b>	<b>885</b>	<b>1,599</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>12,030</b>
<b>Per cent</b>									
<1	14	10	12	15	8	11	4	9	11
1–4	29	22	23	23	23	25	30	30	25
5–9	28	26	26	26	29	27	33	25	27
10–14	25	28	31	27	29	34	26	32	27
15–17	4	14	8	10	11	3	6	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) Children entering care were previously counted only if they received a regular payment in June of the financial year. In 2000–01, children entering care were included if they received regular payments at any time of the year.

Notes: 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.

Over one-third (6%) of the children admitted to out-of-home care were aged under 5 years, with 11% aged under 1 year. New South Wales had the highest proportion of children aged under 5 years (43%), followed by the Northern Territory (39%).

Overall, there were fewer children discharged from care than those admitted. Across Australia (excluding Tasmania) there were 8,799 children discharged from out-of-home care in 2000–01 (Table 4.2). These data were not collected in previous years. The age distribution

of children discharged from care was considerably older than that of children admitted to care. For example 24% of those discharged from care in New South Wales were aged 15 to 17 years, compared with 4% of those admitted to care.

**Table 4.2: Number of children discharged from out-of-home care in 2000–01, by age group, for selected States and Territories<sup>(a)</sup>**

Age (years)	NSW	Vic <sup>(b)</sup>	Qld	WA	SA	ACT	NT	Total
	<b>Number</b>							
<1	151	171	101	58	103	3	12	599
1–4	493	691	245	144	374	35	47	2,029
5–9	390	816	304	184	462	31	41	2,228
10–14	409	796	385	183	468	50	57	2,348
15–17	446	517	228	130	229	26	15	1,591
Unknown	—	—	—	—	—	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,889</b>	<b>2,991</b>	<b>1,263</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>1,636</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>8,799</b>
	<b>Per cent</b>							
<1	8	6	8	8	6	2	7	7
1–4	26	23	19	21	23	24	27	23
5–9	21	27	24	26	28	21	24	25
10–14	22	27	30	26	29	34	33	27
15–17	24	17	18	19	14	18	9	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) Tasmania could not provide these data.

(b) Data were not available for the full year and some estimates were provided.

Note: The data for children exiting care include those who left care and had not returned within 2 months.

## Trends in numbers in out-of-home care

At 30 June 2001 there were 18,241 children in out-of-home care in Australia (Table 4.3). This compares with 16,923 children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2000. The number of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2001 was higher than at 30 June 2000 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 1996 when the AIHW first collected these data. Between 1996 and 2001 the number of children in out-of-home care in Australia increased by 30%. This increase occurred in all jurisdictions. The increase in numbers in Queensland between June 2000 and June 2001 is, to some extent, due to the fact that all children in out-of-home care were included for the first time in 2001.

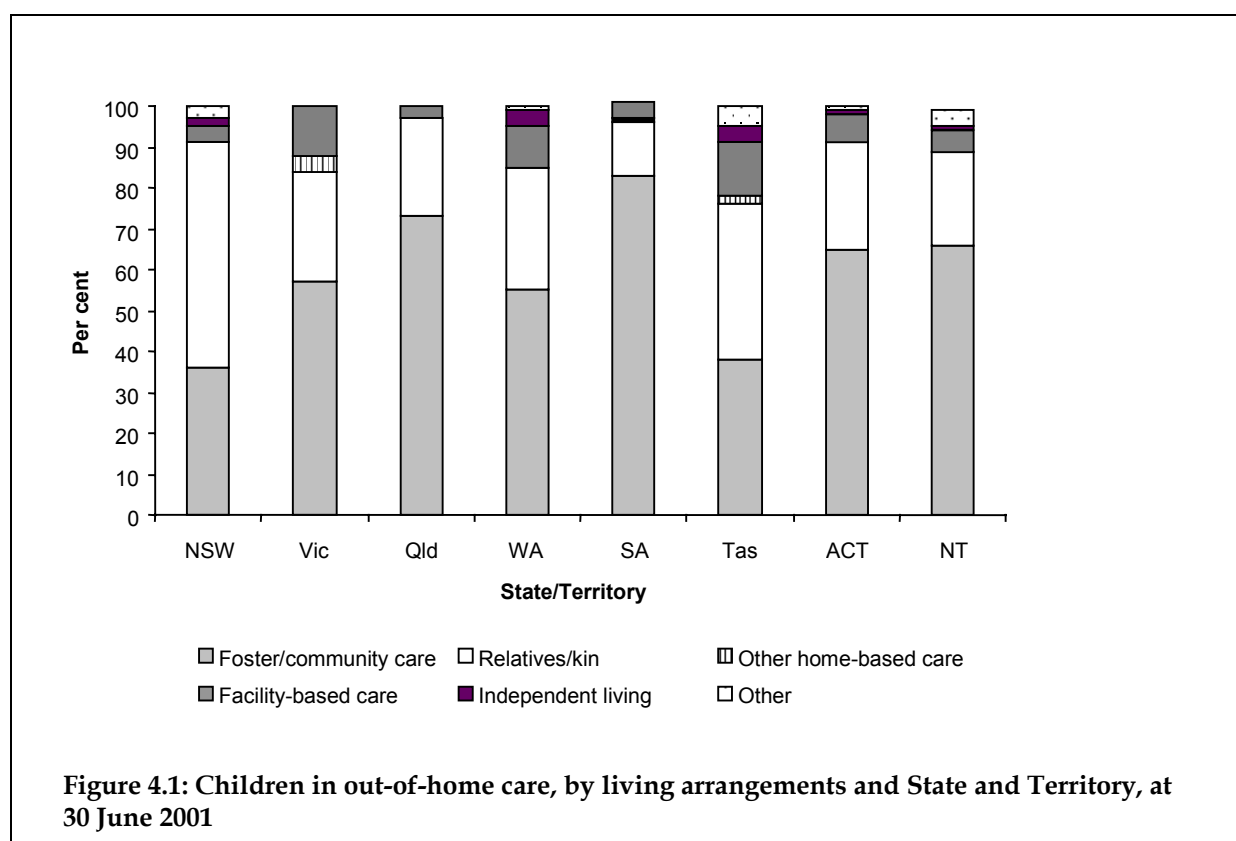
**Table 4.3: Number of children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care, by State and Territory, 30 June 1996 to 2001**

At 30 June	NSW	Vic	Qld <sup>(a)</sup>	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
1996	5,437	3,385	2,110	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
2001	7,786	3,882	3,011	1,436	1,175	572	215	164	18,241

(a) The 1996 data for Queensland only include those children in out-of-home care who were on a care and protection order. The data for the years 1997 to 2000 only include those children who were on a care and protection order or remanded in temporary custody. The 2001 data include all children in out-of-home care.

## Characteristics of children in out-of-home care

Most children (91%) who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2001 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 4.4). 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.



**Figure 4.1: Children in out-of-home care, by living arrangements and State and Territory, at 30 June 2001**

The proportion of children in out-of-home care who were living in facility-based care arrangements was 6% Australia-wide and ranged from 3% in Queensland to 13% in Tasmania. 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. 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, South Australia had a relatively high proportion of children in foster or community care (83%), and New South Wales had a relatively high proportion of children placed with relatives or kin (55%).

**Table 4.4: Children in out-of-home care: type of placement, by State and Territory, at 30 June 2001**

Type of placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA <sup>(a)</sup>	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>									
Foster/community care	2,787	2,196	2,211	791	975	220	140	109	9,429
Relatives/kin	4,279	1,046	719	437	147	219	55	38	6,940
Other home-based care	—	169	—	—	10	13	—	—	192
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>7,066</i>	<i>3,411</i>	<i>2,930</i>	<i>1,228</i>	<i>1,132</i>	<i>452</i>	<i>195</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>16,561</i>
Facility-based care	341	470	81	145	43	72	16	9	1,177
Independent living	120	1	—	57	—	21	2	2	203
Other <sup>(b)</sup>	259	—	—	6	—	27	2	6	300
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,786</b>	<b>3,882</b>	<b>3,011</b>	<b>1,436</b>	<b>1,175</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>18,241</b>
<b>Per cent</b>									
Foster/community care	36	57	73	55	83	38	65	66	52
Relatives/kin	55	27	24	30	13	38	26	23	68
Other home-based care	—	4	—	—	1	2	—	—	1
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>91</i>
Facility-based care	4	12	3	10	4	13	7	5	6
Independent living	2	—	—	4	—	4	1	1	1
Other <sup>(b)</sup>	3	—	—	1	—	5	1	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

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

(b) 'Other' includes unknown living arrangements.

## Age and sex

Around one-third (31%) of children in out-of-home care were aged 10–14 years (Table A1.8). A further 30% were aged 5–9 years, 24% were aged under 5 years and 16% were aged 15–17 years. Just over half (52%) of all children in out-of-home care were boys, though girls outnumbered boys in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory (Table A1.9).

Children in facility-based care were considerably older than children in home-based care, with 42% of children in facility-based care aged 15–17 years compared with 12% in home-

based care (Table A1.10). Only 5% of children in facility-based care in Australia were aged under 5 years compared with 26% of those in home-based care.

### Whether children were on an order

As previously noted for the Northern Territory, all children in out-of-home care were on care and protection orders or authority. In other jurisdictions, the proportion of children in out-of-home care who were on care and protection orders ranged from 74% in Western Australia to 93% in Queensland (Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5: Children in out-of-home care: whether the child was on an order, for selected States and Territories<sup>(a)</sup>, at 30 June 2001**

Whether the child was on an order	NSW	Vic <sup>(b)</sup>	Qld	WA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>								
On a care and protection order	6,952	3,146	2,803	1,056	453	193	164	14,767
On another type of order	—	17	5	—	119	7	—	148
<i>Total children on orders</i>	<i>6,952</i>	<i>3,163</i>	<i>2,808</i>	<i>1,056</i>	<i>572</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>14,915</i>
Not on an order	834	719	203	380	—	15	—	2,151
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,786</b>	<b>3,882</b>	<b>3,011</b>	<b>1,436</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>17,066</b>
<b>Per cent</b>								
On a care and protection order	89	81	93	74	79	90	100	87
On another type of order	—	1	—	—	21	3	—	1
<i>Total children on orders</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>74</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>87</i>
Not on an order	11	18	7	26	—	7	—	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

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

(b) The data from Victoria include estimates from 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 2001 ranged from 6% in Tasmania to 33% in the Australian Capital Territory (Table 4.6). Overall, 57% 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 1% in the Northern Territory to 29% in Tasmania.

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. Not all jurisdictions, however, could identify whether or not children were in respite care. Where it was known that children were in respite care, they were included in the category 'less than 1 month'.

**Table 4.6: Children in out-of-home care: length of time in continuous placement by State and Territory, at 30 June 2001**

Time in continuous placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA <sup>(a)</sup>	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	<b>Number</b>								
< 1 month	1,107	345	315	37	128	159	12	2	2,105
1 month to < 6 months	708	773	669	181	205	139	22	16	2,713
6 months to < 1 year	857	591	461	138	144	132	15	29	2,367
1 year to < 2 years	1,305	808	451	250	144	54	47	50	3,109
2 years to < 5 years	2,207	800	612	397	223	22	47	41	4,349
5 years or more	1,593	471	503	433	288	33	72	26	3,419
Not stated/unknown	9	94	—	—	—	33	—	—	136
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,786</b>	<b>3,882</b>	<b>3,011</b>	<b>1,436</b>	<b>1,132</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>18,198</b>
	<b>Per cent</b>								
< 1 month	14	9	10	3	11	29	6	1	12
1 month to < 6 months	9	20	22	13	18	26	10	10	15
6 months to < 1 year	11	16	15	10	13	24	7	18	13
1 year to < 2 years	17	21	15	17	13	10	22	30	17
2 years to < 5 years	28	21	20	28	20	4	22	25	24
5 years or more	20	12	17	30	25	6	33	16	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) Data do not include 43 children who were in facility-based care.

Note: In those jurisdictions where children in out-of-home care for respite reasons could be identified, they were included in the 'less than 1 month' category: New South Wales (921 children), Victoria (149 children), South Australia (9 children) and the Australian Capital Territory (9 children).

## Rates of children in out-of-home care

There were 3.9 children per 1,000 aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care in Australia at 30 June 2001 (Table 4.7). This is slightly higher than the rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2000 (3.6 per 1,000).

The rates of children in out-of-home care varied by State and Territory and ranged from 2.7 per 1,000 in the Northern Territory to 4.9 per 1,000 in New South Wales. 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 service.

**Table 4.7: Rates of children in out-of-home care, per 1,000 children, by State and Territory, 30 June 1997 to 30 June 2001**

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld <sup>(a)</sup>	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
30 June 1997	3.4	3.0	2.5	2.2	3.2	3.7	2.1	1.9	<b>3.0</b>
30 June 1998	3.5	3.2	2.6	2.3	2.8	3.6	2.2	2.3	<b>3.1</b>
30 June 1999	4.0	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.9	4.4	2.2	3.0	<b>3.3</b>
30 June 2000	4.5	3.4	2.9	2.8	3.2	4.6	2.6	3.0	<b>3.6</b>
30 June 2001	4.9	3.4	3.3	3.0	3.3	4.8	2.8	2.7	<b>3.9</b>

(a) The 1996 data for Queensland only include those children in out-of-home care who were on a care and protection order. The data for the years 1997 to 2000 only include those children who were on a care and protection order or remanded in temporary custody. The 2001 data include all children in out-of-home care.

Source: 1996–97 to 1999–00 data from relevant *Child Protection Australia* publication; 2000–01 data from Table 3.10.

## Trends in rates of children in out-of-home care

The rate of children in out-of-home care in Australia increased from 3.0 per 1,000 at 30 June 1997 to 3.9 per 1,000 at 30 June 2001. Over the period from 1997 to 2000, the rates of children in out-of-home care increased in all jurisdictions. The increase was largest in New South Wales where rates increased from 3.4 to 4.9 per 1,000.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2001 there were 4,073 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (Table 4.8). The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2001 was 21.1 per 1,000, ranging from 4.2 per 1,000 in Tasmania and the Northern Territory to 41.5 per 1,000 in Victoria.

**Table 4.8: 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 2001**

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	2,139	5,647	7,786	38.3	3.7	4.9	10.4:1
Victoria	454	3,428	3,882	41.5	3.0	3.4	13.8:1
Queensland	637	2,374	3,011	11.6	2.8	3.3	4.1:1
Western Australia	456	980	1,436	16.6	2.2	3.0	7.5:1
South Australia	227	948	1,175	20.7	2.8	3.3	7.4:1
Tasmania	31	541	572	4.2	4.9	4.8	0.9:1
Australian Capital Territory	29	186	215	18.6	2.4	2.8	7.8:1
Northern Territory	100	64	164	4.2	1.8	2.7	2.3:1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,073</b>	<b>14,168</b>	<b>18,241</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>6.8:1</b>

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

Sources: ABS 1999a, b, c.

In all jurisdictions except Tasmania, there were higher rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care than other Australian children. In Victoria, the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was over 13 times the rate for other children, and in New South Wales it was over 10 times the rate (Table 4.8).

## Indigenous status of caregivers

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives in many jurisdictions. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed with either an Indigenous carer or a relative, for example, was 87% in New South Wales and 79% in Western Australia (Table 4.9). 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 4.9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care: Indigenous status and relationship of carer, by State and Territory, at 30 June 2001**

Relationship	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
	<b>Number</b>								
Indigenous relative	1,187	89	155	195	34	5	9	38	1,712
Indigenous non-relative	395	115	185	136	111	1	6	29	978
Non-Indigenous relative	271	52	86	28	13	6	2	n.a. <sup>(a)</sup>	458
<i>Total Indigenous or relative</i>	<i>1,853</i>	<i>256</i>	<i>426</i>	<i>359</i>	<i>158</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>3,148</i>
Other	282	198	211	97	69	18	12	29	913
Unknown	4	—	—	—	—	1	—	4	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,139</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,073</b>
	<b>Per cent</b>								
Indigenous relative	56	20	24	43	15	17	31	40	42
Indigenous non-relative	19	25	29	30	49	3	21	30	24
Non-Indigenous relative	13	11	14	6	6	20	7	n.a. <sup>(a)</sup>	11
<i>Total Indigenous or relative</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>79</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>77</i>
Other	13	44	33	21	30	60	41	30	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

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

Note: For details on coding of Indigenous status, see Appendix 2.