

# Permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care: indicators

Web report | Last updated: 23 Mar 2023 | Topic: [Child protection](#)

## About

Permanency is about providing a supportive, stable and permanent home for children in out-of-home care in a timely manner. The *Permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care: indicators* report presents the latest data on indicators under the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (POPF). These indicators are designed to provide an objective measurement of permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care.

Cat. no: CWS 88

- [Indicators](#)
- [Data](#)

### Findings from this report:

- [In 2020-21, 1 in 5 children in out-of-home care were reunified with family](#)
- [In 2019-20, most children \(87%\) who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome did not return within 12 months](#)
- [In 2020-21, about three-quarters of children received a permanency outcome within 2 years of entering out-of-home care](#)
- [In 2020-21, 2% of children exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental responsibility order and 0.2% were adopted](#)

## Summary

This report presents data on 14 indicators under the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (POPF). The POPF is a national data and evaluation framework designed to provide objective measurement of permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care. Aspects of permanency covered by the indicators include:

- Preservation (where families are supported to keep children at home safely)
  - 81% of children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse or neglect were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of the substantiation.
- Reunification (where children are returned home safely after time in out-of-home care)
  - 20% of children in out-of-home care were reunified.
- Stability of reunification (whether reunification is still in place after 12 months)
  - 84% of children who exited to reunification did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
- Types of permanency outcome achieved where reunification is not possible (third-party parental responsibility order or adoption)
  - 2% of children exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental responsibility order.
  - 94 children were adopted from out-of-home care.
- Stability of permanency outcomes
  - 87% of children who left out-of-home care to a permanency outcome did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
  - All but 4 children (99.6%) who exited to a third-party parental responsibility order did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
  - No children who exited to adoption returned to out-of-home care within 12 months.

Indicators on timely and informed decision-making related to permanency arrangements are also presented. These focus on achievement of orders and permanency outcomes within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care.

- 88% of children who received a finalised care and protection order did so within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care.
- 76% of children who received a permanency outcome did so within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care.

Indicators also cover permanency outcomes for those children where it is deemed in their best interests to remain in long term out-of-home care. These indicators focus on children who have been in care for 2 or more years, covering:

- legal stability (which legal orders children are placed on and how long it takes to achieve their order)
  - 82% of children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years were on long-term guardianship orders.
- placement stability (time in placement and number of placements)
  - 87% of children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years had less than 3 placements in their current episode of care.

A summary of all POPF indicators is provided in the table below for quick reference.

Table 1: POPF indicators 2020-21 - national summary

Indicator	National data
<b>Domain 1</b>	<b>Permanent, safe and stable care</b>
1.1a	About 46,200 children (8 per 1,000) aged 0-17 were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021.
1.1b	About 31,400 children (68%) aged 0-17 in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021 had been in out-of-home care for 2 years or more.
	<b>Preservation</b>
1.2	81% of children aged 0-16 who were the subject of a substantiation in 2019-20 were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of the substantiation.
	<b>Reunification and permanent care</b>
1.3	20% of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care (excluding children on long-term guardianship orders) were reunified in 2020-21.
1.4	2% of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care received a third-party parental responsibility order in 2020-21.
1.5	Less than 1% of children (94 children) aged 0-17 in out-of-home care were adopted in 2020-21.

1.6	87% of children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome in 2019-20 did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
1.6a	84% of children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to reunification in 2019-20 did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
1.6b	Almost 100% of children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental responsibility order in 2019-20 did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
1.6c	All children (100%) aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to adoption in 2019-20 did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months.
	<b>Stability</b>
1.7a	82% of children aged 2-17 in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2021 were on long-term guardianship orders.
1.7b	87% of children aged 2-17 in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2021 experienced less than 3 placements in the last 2 years.
<b>Domain 2</b>	<b>Timely and informed decision-making on permanency</b>
2.1	88% of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care received a finalised care and protection order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care in 2020-21.
2.2	76% of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care received a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care in 2020-21.

Source: Supplementary data tables, AIHW Child Protection Collection.

## Why is permanency important?

For children in the child protection system, permanency is about securing a safe, stable and loving home with families that can offer lifetime relationships and a sense of belonging (Tilbury and Osmond 2006; Wright and Collings 2021).

As at 30 June 2021, there were just over 46,200 children in out-of-home care – an increase of 7 per cent (from 43,100) at 30 June 2017 (AIHW 2022a). About 19,500 (42%) of these children were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Nationally, 7,500 children in out-of-home care (76%) received a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care (AIHW 2022a).

### What is permanency?

Permanency is a multifaceted concept, with at least three dimensions including:

- relational permanence: the opportunity to experience positive, caring and stable relationships with significant others
- physical permanence: stable living arrangements
- legal permanence: the legal arrangements of a child's custody and guardianship (Osmond and Tilbury 2012; Wright and Collings 2021).

State and territory departments responsible for child protection start planning for permanency when a child enters out-of-home care. This planning supports families for the return of children to home, where it is safe to do so. At the same time, planning processes also explore alternative long-term arrangements so that they are available if needed.

### The importance of permanency

Research shows that a sense of security, stability, and permanency are strong predictors of better outcomes for children and young people after they leave care. The long-term consequences of a poor start in life flow through to adulthood, including increased reliance on welfare and health systems and other programs (Walsh et al. 2018).

Children in long-term out-of-home care, and those who experience multiple placements, are at greater risk of adverse outcomes for mental health and wellbeing, suitable accommodation, employment and relational stability, as well as disproportionately high rates of substance abuse and over-representation in youth justice systems (Malvaso et al. 2017; Lima et al. 2018; AIHW 2022b).

Permanency provides children in out-of-home care with the foundation to prepare for and participate in adulthood, and to pursue life goals such as education and employment. The achievement of a permanent placement for children in out-of-home care is considered to be crucial for a successful transition to adulthood (Salazar et al. 2018).

### What are permanency outcomes?

Permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care include preservation, reunification, third-party parental responsibility orders and adoptions. For some children a long-term placement in out-of-home care is also considered a suitable outcome.

Legal permanency can involve full or partial transfer of legal guardianship to the relevant state or territory department or non-government agency. It encompasses the following types:

- Finalised care and protection orders involve transfer of some responsibility for the child's welfare to the relevant child protection department or a non-government agency.
- Guardianship orders (excluding third-party orders) involve transfer of legal guardianship to the relevant state or territory department or a non-government agency.

This range of permanency outcomes reflect the different needs of children and that for some children, especially those with complex needs or those requiring ongoing case management, the most suitable outcome can be a long-term placement in out-of-home care.

### References

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AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2022a) *Child protection Australia 2020-21*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

AIHW (2022b) *Young people under youth justice supervision and their interaction with the child protection system 2020-21*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 2 December 2022.

Lima F, Maclean M and O'Donnell M (2018) *Exploring outcomes for children who have experienced out-of-home care*, Telethon Kids Institute, accessed 2 August 2022.

Malvaso CG, Delfabbro PH and Day A (2017) 'The child protection and juvenile justice nexus in Australia: a longitudinal examination of the relationship between maltreatment and offending', *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 64:32-46, doi:[10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.028](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.11.028).

Osmond J and Tilbury C (2012) 'Permanency planning concepts', *Children Australia*, 37(3):100-107, doi:[10.1017/cha.2012.28](https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2012.28).

Salazar AM, Jones KR, Amemiyac J, Cherry A, Brown EC, Catalano RF, and Monahan KC (2018) 'Defining and achieving permanency among older youth in foster care', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 87:9-16, doi:[10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.006).

Tilbury C and Osmond J (2006) 'Permanency planning in foster care: a research review and guidelines for practitioners', *Australian Social Work*, 59(3):265-280, doi:[10.1080/03124070600833055](https://doi.org/10.1080/03124070600833055).

Walsh P, McHugh M, Blunden H and Katz I (2018) *Literature Review: Factors Influencing the Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Research Report Number 6*, Department of Family and Community Services, New South Wales Government, accessed 3 August 2022.

Wright AM and Collings S (2021) *The multiple meanings of permanency*, Australian Institute of Family Studies website, accessed 6 October 2022.

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# Measuring permanency outcomes in the child protection system

## Policy context

Community Services Ministers from the Australian and state and territory governments agreed in 2018 to adopt the Guiding Principles for Best Practise in achieving permanency, and to a shared National Permanency Outcomes Statement. These aim to achieve timely and more consistent permanency decisions for children and young people, while ensuring that their best interests are protected (AIHW 2016).

Ministers committed to reducing state guardianship for children who could not be safely reunified with their families within a reasonable time, to ensure they have the right to grow up in a family that is permanent, stable and safe.

The Permanency Outcomes Statement proposed a national approach to child protection and out-of-home care, in which children and young people experience:

- safe and stable care
- timely decision making on permanency that takes into account the views of the child
- lifelong relationships and a sense of belonging, identity and connection to culture and community (AIHW 2016).

Development of data reporting and an evaluation framework measuring outcomes were agreed as part of ministerial commitments promoting permanency for children in out-of-home care. The Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (POPF) was developed in 2018 under the *Fourth Action Plan 2018-20 of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* to measure jurisdictional performance on achieving permanency outcomes (Seselja 2017; CSM 2018; DSS 2018).

## The Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework

The framework provides objective measurements of performance, based on the following 4 domains:

### Domain 1: Permanent, safe and stable care

Vulnerable children who are at risk of entering, or who have experienced out-of-home care have permanent, safe and stable care.

#### Outcomes:

Families are supported to allow children to remain at home following the substantiation of a child concern report, whenever it is safe to do so.

Children in out-of-home care are reunified with their parents, families, or former guardian whenever it is safe to do so.

Children in out-of-home care who are unable to live with their parents, families or former guardian achieve a permanent care arrangement.

Children in a permanent care arrangement feel safe and secure.

Children in out-of-home care have as few placements as possible.

### Domain 2: Timely and informed decision making

Vulnerable children who have experienced out-of-home care have timely decision making on permanency that takes into account the views of the child.

#### Outcomes:

Children are included in decision making about their permanency arrangements.

Children receive timely decisions about their permanency arrangements.

### Domain 3: Achieve better life outcomes and realise their full potential

Vulnerable children who have experienced out-of-home care achieve better life outcomes and realise their full potential.

#### Outcomes:

Children have strong physical, social and mental health.

Children attend, participate and achieve in quality education or employment.

Children leave care equipped for the future.

### Domain 4: Lifelong relationships, belonging, identity and connection

Vulnerable children who have experienced out-of-home care have lifelong relationships and a sense of belonging, identity and connection to their culture and their community.

#### Outcomes:

Children have a connection with their family.

Children have their cultural needs identified and responded to.

Children are living within their cultural community.

Children feel a sense of identity and belonging to family, culture and community.

## Report overview

This report presents data on 14 indicators for Domains 1 and 2 under the POPF. The POPF is a national data and evaluation framework designed to provide objective measurement of permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care. Aspects of permanency covered by the indicators include:

- Preservation (where families are supported to keep children at home safely)
- Reunification (where children are returned home safely after time in out-of-home care)
- Where reunification is not possible, what permanency outcome is achieved (third-party parental responsibility order or adoption)
- Stability of permanency outcomes (whether it is still in place after 12 months)

Indicators on timely and informed decision-making related to permanency arrangements are also presented. These focus on achievement of orders and permanency outcomes within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care.

Other indicators relate to children for whom it's deemed in their best interests to remain in long term out-of-home care. These indicators focus on children who have been in care for more than 2 years, covering:

- legal stability (which legal orders children are placed on and how long it takes to achieve their order)
- placement stability (time in placement and number of placements)

A list of all POPF indicators, including data for the most recent reporting period, is provided in Table 1 on the [Summary](#) page.

## Previous reporting of permanency indicators

The POPF indicators have previously been reported in:

- [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#) - included state and territory data for all POPF indicators. Data tables included at least 3 disaggregating variables, which resulted in a high prevalence of small numbers (less than 5) being reported (AIHW 2020).
- [Child protection Australia 2019-20](#) - contained data for all POPF indicators, but at the national-level only, to reduce the prevalence of small numbers (AIHW 2021).
- [Child protection Australia 2020-21](#) - includes data for 3 POPF indicators (AIHW 2022).

This report marks the first time that POPF indicators are reported in a stand-alone product. The main differences between the content of this report and previous reporting of POPF indicators are that:

- POPF indicators have been refined, where required, to measure specific outcome areas or targets
- the number of disaggregating variables in data tables have been reduced, to lower the prevalence of small numbers
- time-series data for indicators are reported for the first time.

Note that, in this report, suppression has been applied to some small numbers for Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, by request.

Data for indicator 1.7c, which records the proportion of children who were in their main care arrangement for 2 or more years - a measure of placement stability - is not included in this report as the indicator is undergoing further development by AIHW and stakeholders. This indicator will be included in future reporting once development is complete.

## References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2016) [Permanency planning in child protection](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 9 August 2022.

AIHW (2020) [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

AIHW (2021) [Child protection Australia 2019-20](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

AIHW (2022) [Child protection Australia 2020-21](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

CSM (Community Services Ministers) (1 June 2018) [Community Services Ministers' Meeting Communiqué](#) [media release], Australian Government, accessed 3 August 2022.

DSS (Department of Social Services) (2018) [Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 – Fourth Action Plan 2018-2020](#), DSS, Australian Government, accessed 12 August 2022.

Seselja, the Hon. Z (25 August 2017) *Community Services Ministers' Meeting Communiqué* [media release], Australian Government, accessed 28 April 2022.

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## Types of permanency outcome

### Before a child enters care (preservation)

Preservation describes the aim of preventing unnecessary entry into out-of-home care for children who have an interaction with the child protection system. Through early intervention and effective family support, children are enabled to remain within their family where it is safe to do so.

Indicator 1.2 is a proxy measure for preservation. It reports on children aged 0-16 who were the subject of a substantiation and were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of the substantiation. It is assumed that supports have been provided to the family to enable the child to remain safely at home. Data is reported for the previous financial year (2019-20) since the indicator covers the 12 months following the initial substantiation.

In 2019-20:

- Nearly 48,900 children were the subject of a substantiation and were not living in out-of-home care. Of these children, approximately 39,600 (81%) were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of the substantiation (See Table S1.2).
- The proportion of children not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of a substantiation ranged from 61% in South Australia to 93% in New South Wales.
- Nearly 14,300 Indigenous children were the subject of a substantiation. Of these children, 10,900 (76%) were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of the substantiation.

### After a child enters out-of-home care

When preservation of families is not possible, permanency planning is initiated and the most suitable permanency outcome for the child is considered.

In Australia, most states and territories prioritise specific permanency-related actions and timeframes in children's case planning. By incorporating permanency goals into a child's case planning, jurisdictions can actively seek the most suitable immediate placement, while preparing for long-term care arrangements and better developmental outcomes. The timeframe for reunification varies across jurisdictions, but for most jurisdictions, if a child is not reunified within 2 years, then a long-term, stable placement will be pursued. For more information see Appendix G of *Child protection Australia 2018-19* (AIHW 2020).

#### Box 2: Permanency outcome exclusions

Children on long-term guardianship or custody orders are excluded from POPF indicators on reunification (Indicators 1.3 and 1.6a) as these placements are not generally the focus of reunification efforts.

Long-term guardianship or custody orders are used in recognition that for some children, especially those with complex needs or requiring ongoing case management, the best permanency outcome is a long-term placement in out-of-home care.

### Reunification

Safe reunification of a child with their family is a policy priority for all states and territories (Fernandez 2014). The aim of reunification is to return a child home quickly and safely after time spent in care, and to enable that child to stay at home. This occurs when it is in the child's best interest and where it will safeguard the child's long-term stability and permanency (AIHW 2016).

Reunification is also a key part of state and territory governments implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (AIHW 2022).

Indicator 1.3 measures the proportion of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care (excluding children on long-term guardianship orders) who were reunified in the reporting period. This indicator is the same as the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicator 2.3](#) (AIHW 2022).

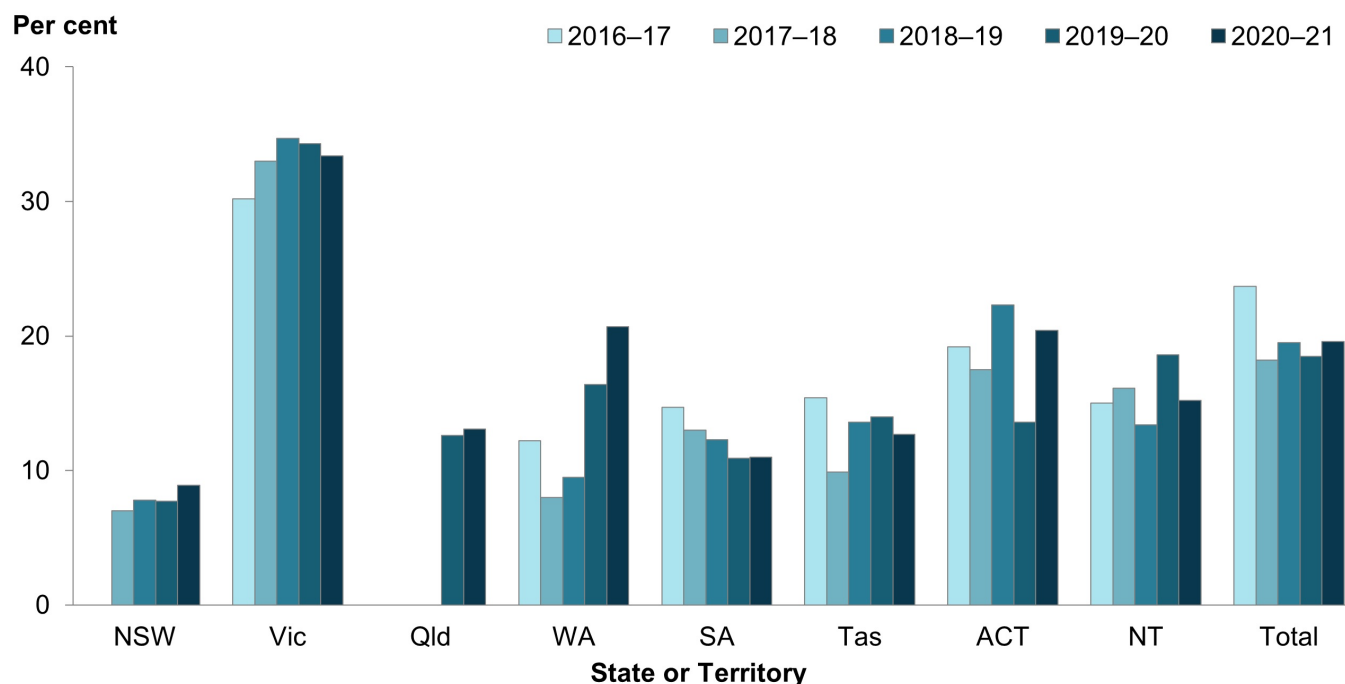
Note that data tables and the associated figure for this indicator include 5 years of data because the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle indicators report data since 2016-17.

In 2020-21:

- There were over 27,300 children in out-of-home care for whom reunification was a possibility. This excludes children in out-of-home care on long-term guardianship or custody orders (see Box 2). Of these children, 20% were reunified in the reporting period (Figure 1).
- Reunification rates ranged from 9% in New South Wales to 33% in Victoria.
- There were almost 10,300 Indigenous children in out-of-home care for whom reunification was a possibility. Reunification rates for Indigenous children have remained at or below 16%, after dropping from 18% in 2016-17.

Indicator 1.3 does not measure reunification success or the ongoing safety of the child. Children on long-term guardianship orders were excluded from this indicator as these children are not generally a focus for reunification efforts.

Figure 1: Children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care (excluding children on long-term guardianship orders) who were reunified, by state and territory, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (per cent) (Indicator 1.3)



#### Notes

1. For New South Wales, reunification data were not available for 2016-17.
2. For Queensland, reunification data were not available for 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.
3. In Western Australia, reunification refers to a child being reunified with one or both parents. The term parent refers to a person, other than the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Communities, who, by law, has responsibility for the day-to-day and long-term care, welfare and development of the child.

Chart: AIHW. Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021 Table S1.3.

### Third-party parental responsibility orders

After reunification, the next most utilised permanency outcome are third-party parental responsibility orders. These are a longer-term care arrangement where guardianship is granted to a third party who is not the minister/executive. For many children, they are pursued only when safe reunification is not possible, or when alternate care has been deemed the most suitable way to achieve stability for the child (Osmond and Tilbury 2012).

Indicator 1.4 measures the proportion of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care who received a third-party parental responsibility order in the reporting period.

In 2020-21:

- Approximately 2% of the 55,000 children in out-of-home care received a third-party parental responsibility order. This proportion was similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children (Table S1.4).
- Rates of exit from out-of-home care to a third-party parental responsibility order ranged from 0% in the Northern Territory to 4% in Victoria.

### Adoption

Children in out of home care with no plan to be reunited with their birth family can be adopted. Whether or not adoption is pursued as a permanency outcome is dependent on state and territory policy and practice (Butlinski et al. 2018).

For adoption to be pursued it generally must be assessed as the best option for the child. Consideration is given to the ability of prospective adoptee families to provide independently for the child for the rest of their life, as well as the rights of everyone involved being upheld (Ward et al. 2022).

Indicator 1.5 measures the proportion of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care who were adopted by known carers, that is, the foster parents or other non-relatives who had been caring for the child in out-of-home care. In 2020-21 there were 94 known-carer adoptions from out-of-home care, equating to 0.2% of children in out-of-home care (Table S1.5).

### References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2016) *Permanency planning in child protection*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 9 August 2022.

AIHW (2020) *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

AIHW (2022) *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle indicators*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 26 August 2022.

Butlinski A, Rowe H, Goddard C and Freezer N (2019) 'The adoption of children from out-of-home care: how decision-makers explain the low rates of adoption in Victoria, Australia', *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 13(2):170-195, doi:[10.1080/15548732.2018.1498428](https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2018.1498428).

Fernandez E (2014) 'Child protection and vulnerable families: trends and issues in the Australian context', *Social Sciences*, 3(4):785-808, doi:[10.3390/socsci3040785](https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3040785).

Osmond J and Tilbury C (2012) 'Permanency planning concepts', *Children Australia*, 37(3):100-107, doi:[10.1017/cha.2012.28](https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2012.28).

Ward H, Moggach L, Tregagle and Trivedi H (2022) *Outcomes of open adoption from out-of-home care in Australia. Executive summary*, Barnardos Australia, accessed 19 September 2022.

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## Stability of permanency outcomes

Placement stability is measured by the extent to which children remain outside of out-of-home care following a permanency outcome.

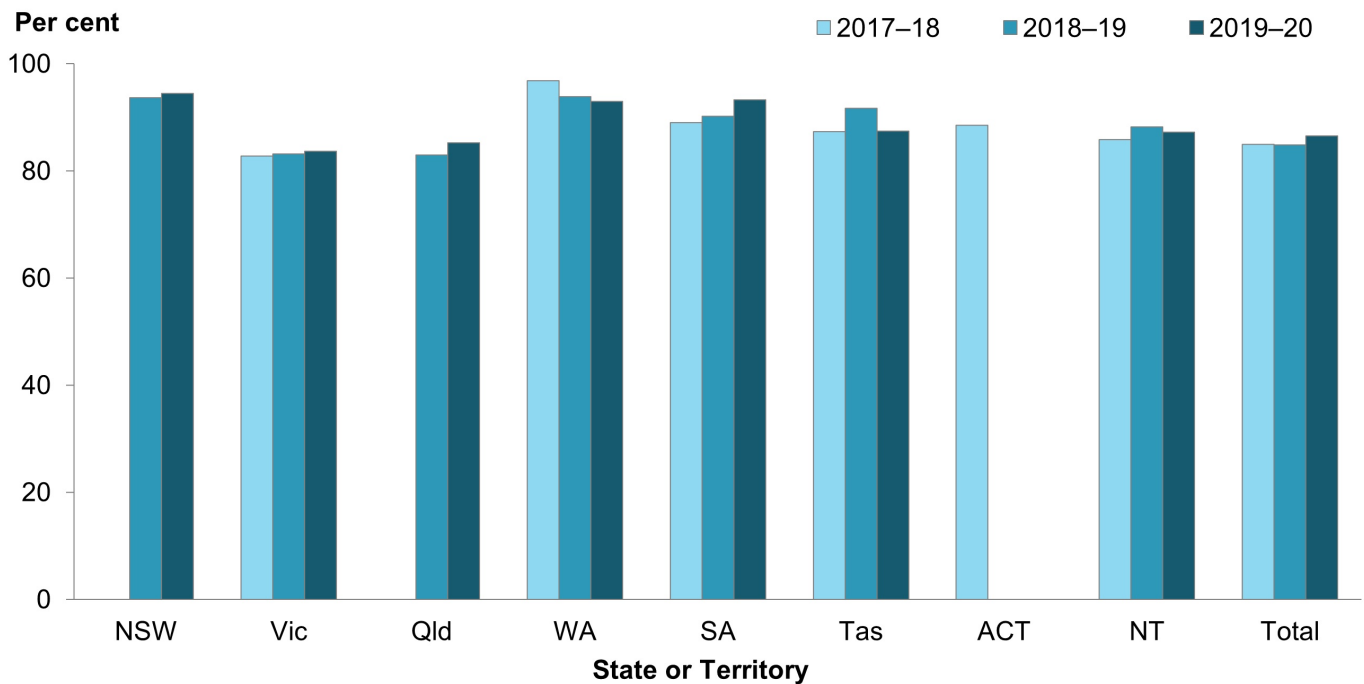
### Within 12 months of exiting out-of-home care

Indicator 1.6 measures the proportion of children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome in the reporting period and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months. Data is reported for the previous financial year (2019-20) since the indicator covers the 12 months following the exit.

In 2019-20:

- 87% of the 6,500 children who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months. This proportion was the same for the 1,900 Indigenous and 4,500 non-Indigenous children who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome (Table S1.6).
- The proportion of children who did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months ranged from 84% in Victoria to 94% in New South Wales (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months, by state and territory, 2017-18 to 2019-20 (per cent) (Indicator 1.6)**



#### Notes

1. Data for New South Wales and Queensland are not available for 2017-18.
2. Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have requested suppression of numbers below 5 (excluding 0) and AIHW has applied additional suppression.

Chart: AIHW. Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021 Table S1.6

In Indicators 1.6a-c this data is separated into the 3 types of permanency outcome: reunification, third-party responsibility order and adoption.

Note that Indicator 1.6a is the same as the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicator 2.4](#) (AIHW 2022).

In 2019-20:

- 84% of the 5,200 children aged 0-16 who were reunified with family during the reporting period did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months. This proportion was the same for the 1,500 Indigenous and 3,600 non-Indigenous children who were reunified with family during the reporting period (Table S1.6a).
- The proportion of children who did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification ranged from 82% in Victoria and Queensland to 92% in Western Australia (Table S1.6a).
- All but 4 of the 1,100 children (99.6%) aged 0-16 who exited to third-party parental responsibility order did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months (Table S1.6b).

- All of the 160 children who exited to adoption did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months (Table S1.6c).

## References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2022) *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle indicators*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 26 August 2022.

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## Legal permanency

It is generally agreed that permanency planning should commence from the time children are admitted to out-of-home care. Before a suitable legal permanency outcome is identified and achieved, a child may be on interim/temporary orders and/or other arrangements (Osmond and Tilbury 2012).

Legal permanency can involve full or partial transfer of legal guardianship to the relevant state or territory department or non-government agency. A finalised care and protection order involves transfer of some responsibility for the child's welfare to the relevant child protection department or non-government agency. Guardianship orders involve transfer of legal guardianship to the relevant state or territory department or non-government agency.

Reunification does not change the legal status of parents. Third-party parental responsibility orders and adoption involve transfer of all parental responsibilities to a nominated person(s) whom the court considers appropriate. For adoption, any legal rights of the parents are also removed permanently.

For more information on legal permanency, including details on the policy and practises used by each state and territory, refer to Appendix F of *Child protection Australia 2018-19* (AIHW 2020).

### Within 2 years of entering out-of-home care

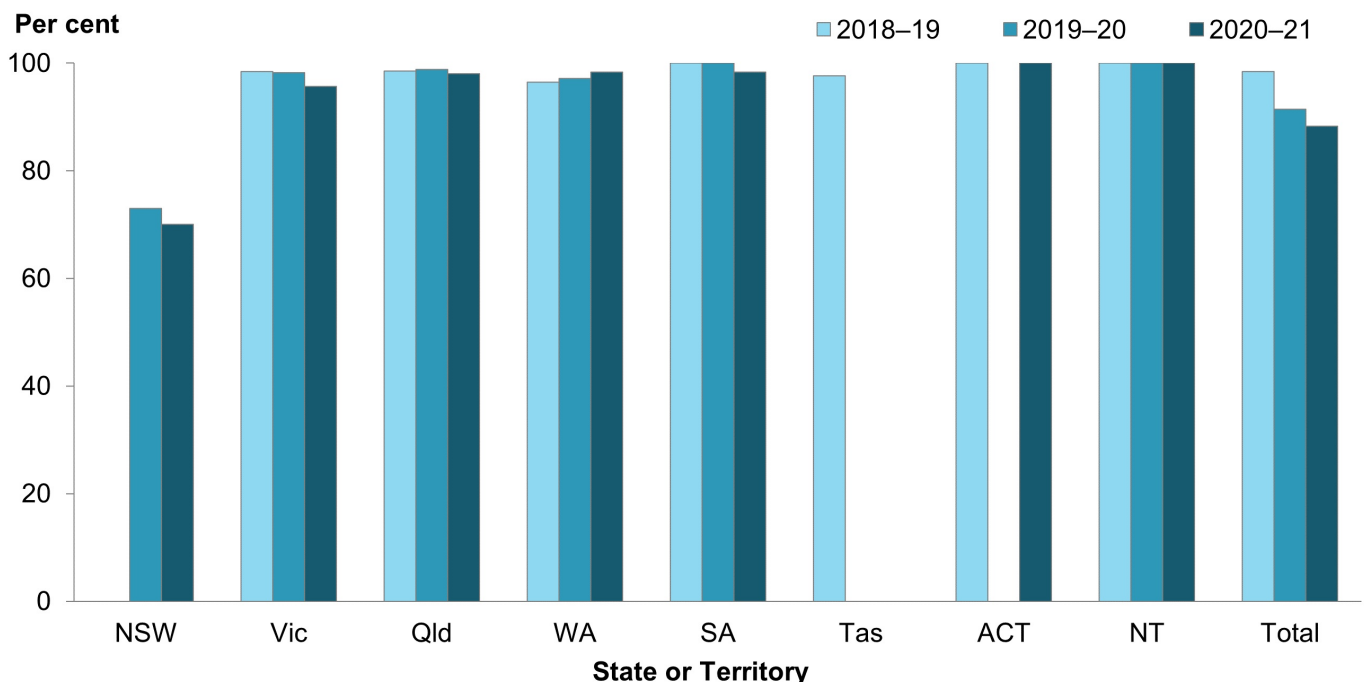
In most jurisdictions a long-term stable placement will be pursued if a child is not reunified within 2 years of entry to out-of-home care (see Appendix G of *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, AIHW 2020). However, time from admission to out-of-home care to achieving a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order for children varies considerably across jurisdictions (see Figure 4; tables S2.2a and S2.2b). This is due mostly to the different mix of permanency outcomes in each jurisdiction, as well as differences in policy and practice priorities. It is nevertheless recognised that family-led and evidence-based decision making takes time, to ensure outcomes for children that are sustainable and stable over the long term.

Reunifications tend to occur shortly after admission, whereas guardianship or third-party parental responsibility orders can occur much later. Average time to achieving a permanency outcome therefore varies across states and territories, based at least in part on the relative proportions of reunifications versus guardianship or third-party parental responsibility orders each pursues (Table S2.2b).

Indicator 2.1 measures the proportion of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care who received a finalised care and protection order in the reporting period within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care.

- Of the 7,700 children who received a finalised care and protection order in 2020-21, 88% received it within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care. This proportion was the same for the 3,000 Indigenous and 4,700 non-Indigenous children who received a finalised care and protection order (Table S2.1).
- The proportion of children receiving a finalised care and protection order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care ranged from 70% in New South Wales to 100% in the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care who received a finalised care and protection order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care, by state and territory, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (per cent) (Indicator 2.1)**



## Notes

1. Data for New South Wales are not available for 2018-19.
2. Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have requested suppression of numbers below 5 (excluding 0) and AIHW has applied additional suppression.

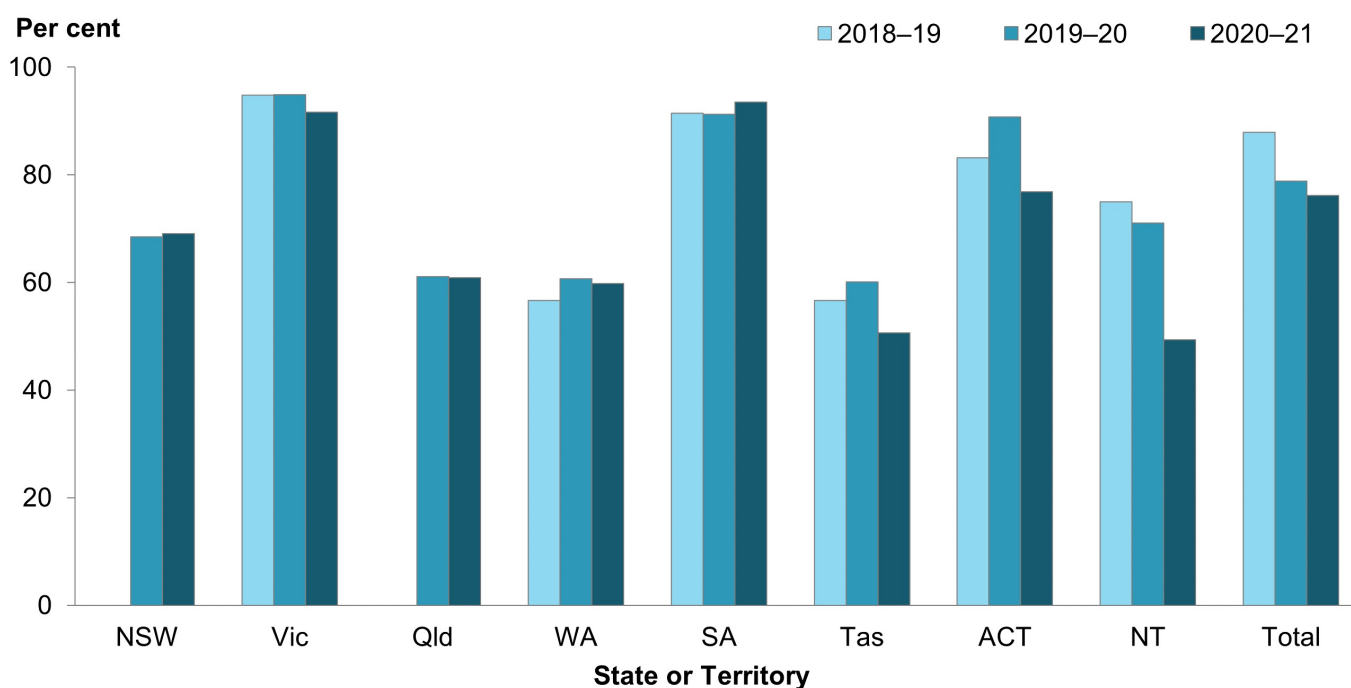
Chart: AIHW. Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021 Table S2.1

Indicator 2.2 measures the proportion of children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care who received a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order in the reporting period within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care.

In 2020-21:

- 76% of the 9,900 children who received a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order did so within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care (Table S2.2a).
- The proportion of children receiving a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care ranged from 49% in the Northern Territory to 94% in South Australia (Figure 4).
- 70% of the 3,500 Indigenous children who received a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order did so within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care (Table S2.2a).

**Figure 4: Children aged 0-17 in out-of-home care who received a permanency outcome or long-term guardianship order within 2 years of admission to out-of-home care, by state and territory, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (per cent) (Indicator 2.2)**



Notes: Data for New South Wales and Queensland are not available for 2018-19.

Chart: AIHW. Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021 Table S2.2

## References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2020) *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

Osmond J and Tilbury C (2012) 'Permanency planning concepts', *Children Australia*, 37(3):100-107, doi:[10.1017/cha.2012.28](https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2012.28).

## Stability for children in out-of-home care

The stability of a child's living situation can be assessed by their continuous time spent in out-of-home care and the number of placements they experienced. Long-term care arrangements provide stability of placement, relationships, and legal circumstance for children in care. State and territory policies relating to permanency planning suggest that children who have been in care for two or more years require a decision to be made regarding their long-term care arrangements (AIHW 2016).

Stability for children in care encompasses multiple dimensions, including legal stability - the type of order they are on - and placement stability - the number of placements they have experienced.

### Legal stability for children in out-of-home care for 2 years or more

Indicator 1.7a measures the proportion of children aged 2-17 in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June who were on long-term guardianship orders.

As at 30 June 2021:

- 82% of the 31,400 children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years were on long-term guardianship orders (Table S1.7a).
- The proportion of children who were on long-term guardianship orders ranged from 79% in New South Wales and Queensland to 98% in South Australia (Figure 5).
- Nationally, 11,100 (82%) of the 13,500 Indigenous children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2021 were on long-term guardianship orders (Table S1.7a).

**Figure 5: Children aged 2-17 in out-of-home care for 2 or more years, and on long-term guardianship orders at 30 June, by state and territory, 2019 to 2021 (per cent) (Indicator 1.7a)**

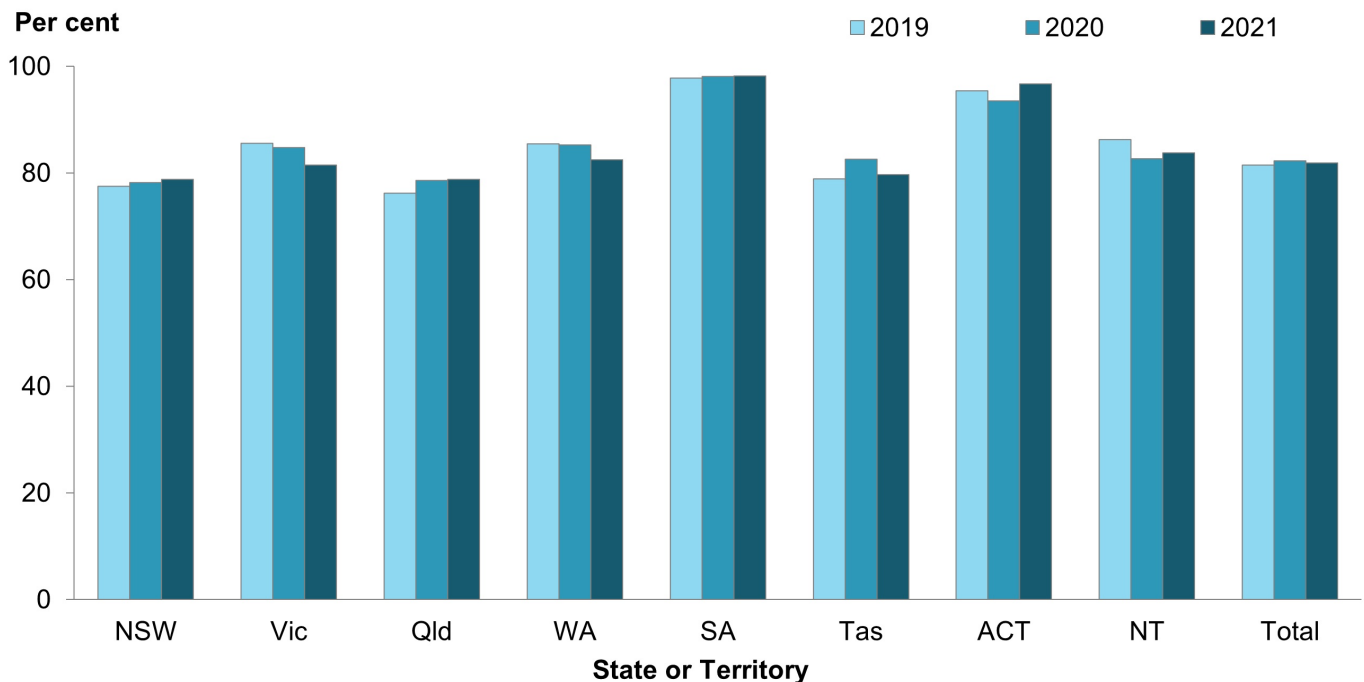


Chart: AIHW. Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021 Table S1.7a

### Placement stability for children in out-of-home care for 2 years or more

Indicator 1.7b measures the proportion of children aged 2-17 in out-of-home care for 2 years or more at 30 June of the reporting period who experienced less than 3 placements in the 2 years prior.

At 30 June 2021:

- Of the 31,400 children who were in out-of-home care for 2 or more years, 87% had less than 3 placements in the last 2 years (tables S1.7b(i) and S1.7b(ii)).
- The proportion of children who were in out-of-home care for 2 or more years with less than 3 placements in the last 2 years ranged from 77% in Queensland to 93% in the Australian Capital Territory (Figure 6).
- Nationally, 11,600 (86%) of the 13,500 Indigenous children who were in out-of-home care for 2 or more years had been in less than 3 placements in the last 2 years (Table S1.7b(i)).



Figure 6: Children aged 2-17 in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June with less than 3 placements in the last 2 years, by state and territory, 2019 to 2021, (per cent) (Indicator 1.7b)



Note: Data for New South Wales are not available for 2019

Chart: AIHW. Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021, Table S1.7b(i)

## References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2016) *Permanency planning in child protection*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 9 August 2022.

## Technical notes

### Data source and methods

The data used for the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (POPF) indicators are sourced from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS). The CP NMDS is a national unit record data collection, with data supplied by all states and territories except New South Wales, who provide aggregate child protection data.

Aggregate data was also provided by Queensland for indicators 1.5 and 1.6c, which relate to adoptions of children from out-of-home care.

Additional details on caveats relating to data in the CP NMDS can be found in the supplementary data tables and footnotes from [Child protection Australia](#) reports.

### Children in out-of-home care

Data reported for the POPF indicators are based on the nationally consistent definition of out-of-home care that was implemented for national reporting in 2018-19. Data reported for years prior to 2018-19 in this report have been derived using the nationally consistent definition of out-of-home care to ensure comparability over time. For more details on the definition of out-of-home care and children on third-party orders, see [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#) (AIHW 2020).

### More information

Background information and technical specifications for all indicators are available in [Permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care: indicators - Background information and technical specifications](#). A summary of permanency-related concepts and legislation across jurisdictions, with insights into the comparability of permanency data across jurisdictions, is available in Appendix F of [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#) (AIHW 2020).

Metadata standards for these indicators are stored in Australia's online metadata repository, [METEOR](#), hosted by the AIHW.

### References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2020) [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 15 June 2022.

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## Glossary

Refer to the AIHW's [child protection glossary](#) for definitions of terminology used in this report. Supplementary definitions are provided in the *Permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care: indicators - Background information and technical specifications*.

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# Data

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## Related material

### Resources

#### Australia's welfare topic summary

Brief summaries that present easily digestible, interactive information on health and welfare topics.

[Topic summary: Child protection](#)

### Related topics

- [Children & youth](#)
  - [First Nations people](#)
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