

Child protection Australia 2018-19: children in the child protection system

Web report | Last updated: 18 Mar 2020 | Topic: [Child protection](#)

Introduction

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

A complementary report [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#) is also available.

Cat. no: CWS 75

If you believe a child is in immediate danger or in a life-threatening situation call 000

If you wish to report a child protection matter, [contact the department responsible for child protection in your state or territory](#).

[See legislation on mandatory reporting and definitions of children 'in need of care and protection'](#) in your state or territory.

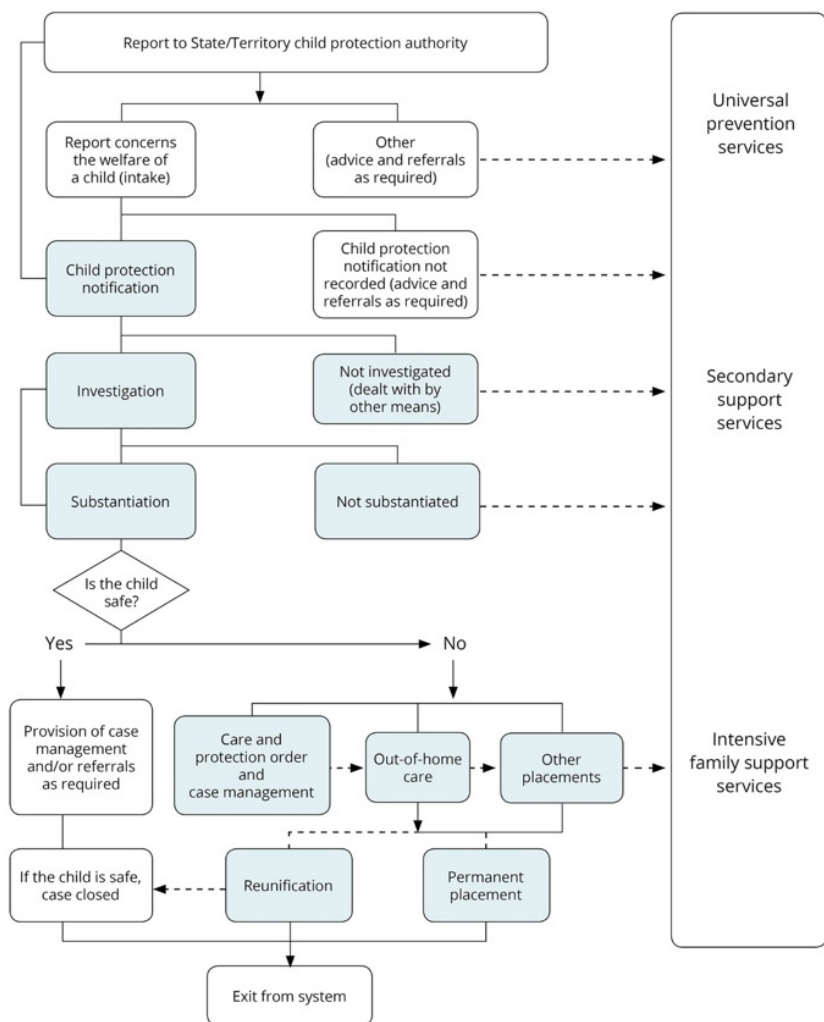
Child protection overview

In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for statutory child protection. Each responsible department assists vulnerable children who have been, or are at risk of being, abused, neglected, or otherwise harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

Children and young people are those aged under 18. This includes unborn children in jurisdictions where they are covered under the child protection legislation.

Across Australia, the broad processes in child protection systems are similar. A simplified version of the main processes is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Child protection process in Australia



Notes

1. Shaded boxes are items for which data are collected nationally.
2. Dashed lines indicate that clients might or might not receive these services, depending on need, service availability, and client willingness to participate in what are voluntary services.
3. Support services referred to in the box on the right include family preservation and reunification services provided by government departments responsible for child protection, and other agencies. Children and families move in and out of these services and the statutory child protection system, and might also be in the statutory child protection system while receiving support services.

This report

This report presents the latest available data on Australia’s child protection systems. It brings together information from states and territories on the provision of child protection services and the characteristics of children who receive protective services.

As a result of issues experienced by jurisdictions, there are some data limitations for this report. For further information, please see [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#).

Children receiving child protection services

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

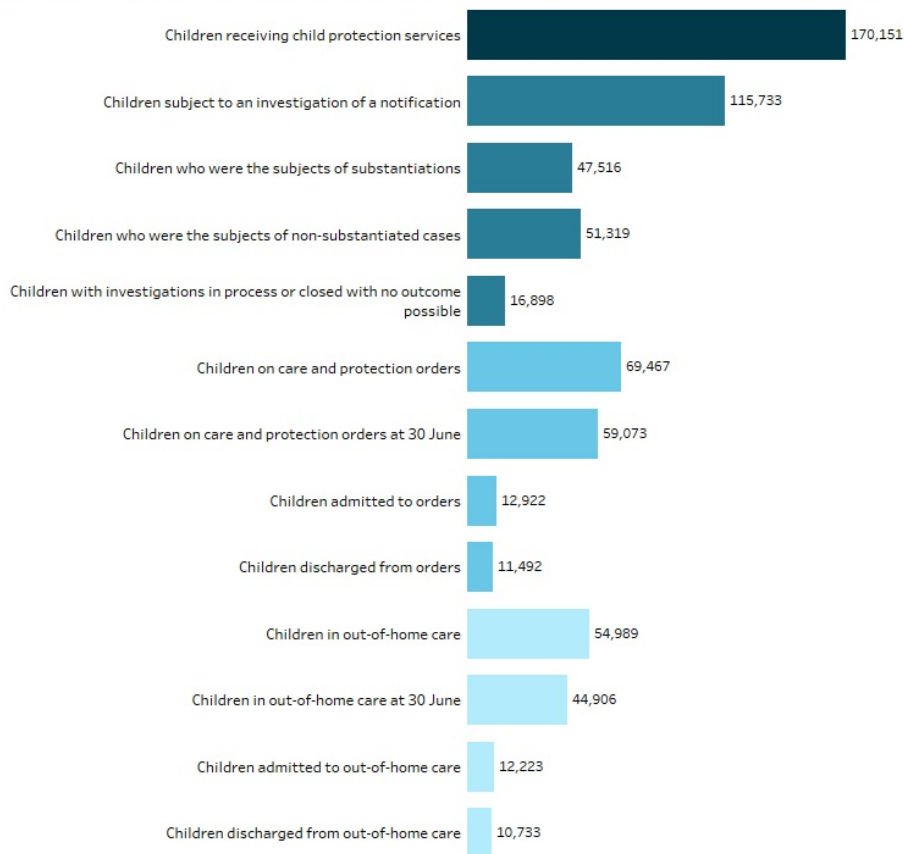
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Cat. no: CWS 75

In 2018-19, 170,200 children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or in out-of-home care) at a rate of 30 per 1,000 children.

Of the children receiving child protection services in 2018-19, 115,700 were the subject of an investigation (21 per 1,000), 69,500 were on a care and protection order (12 per 1,000) and 55,000 were in out-of-home care (10 per 1,000) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Children receiving child protection services during 2018-19 (number)

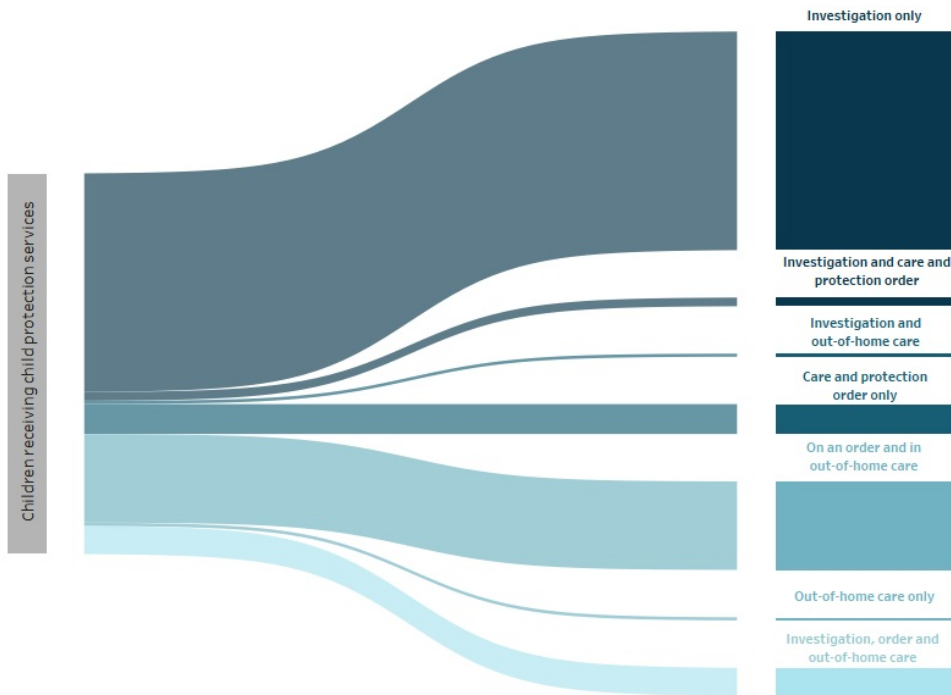


Sources: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Tables 2.2, 4.2, S3.3, S5.1, S5.2 and T2.

Children may receive a combination of child protection services meaning that links and overlaps exist between the data collections for notification, investigation and substantiation; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care.

Over half (58%) of children receiving child protection services during 2018-19 were subject to an investigation only (that is, they were not subsequently placed on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care). This reflects investigation outcomes, where there are a greater number of cases do not meet the threshold of harm and are not substantiated. Only 7% of children were involved in all 3 components of the system (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Children receiving child protection services, by type of services received, 2018–19 (number)

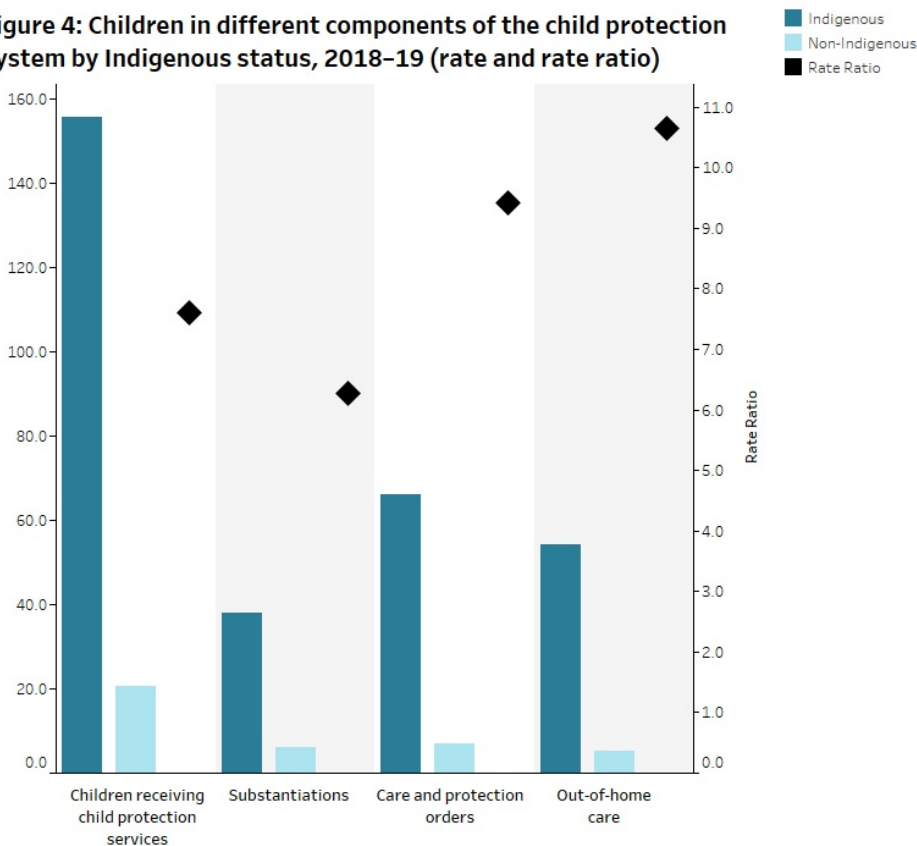


Note: Children reported in this table were the recipients of one or more child protection services in 2018–19. Notifications for these children may have occurred outside the current reporting period.

Source: Child protection Australia 2018–19, Table S2.1.

Indigenous children are over-represented across the child protection system (Figure 4), with Indigenous children being almost 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be receiving child protection services. More specifically, Indigenous children were 6 times as likely to be the subject of substantiated abuse or neglect, around 9 times as likely to be on a care and protection order at June 30 and 11 times as likely to be in out-of-home care when compared to non-Indigenous children.

Figure 4: Children in different components of the child protection system by Indigenous status, 2018–19 (rate and rate ratio)



Note: 'Children receiving child protection services' and 'Substantiations' are measured in financial years. 'Care and protection orders' and 'Out-of-home care' are measured at 30 June 2019.

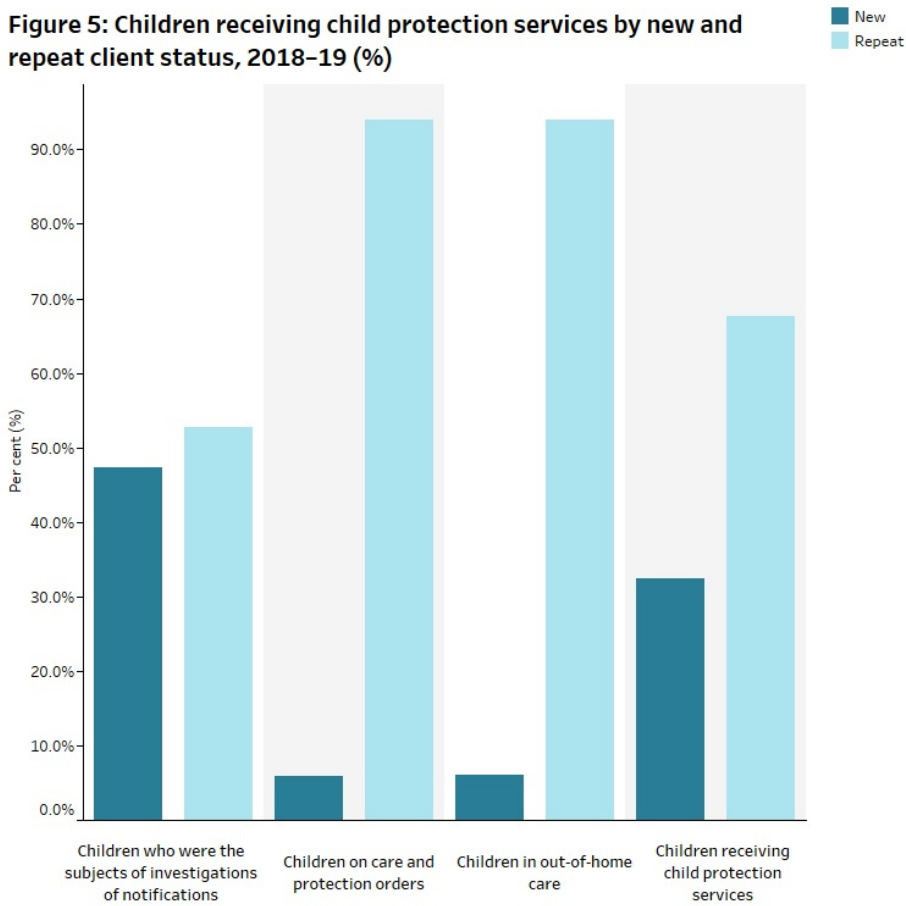
Sources: Child protection Australia 2018–19, Tables S2.3, S3.9, S4.9 and S5.10.

New and repeat clients

Examining client data provides some insight into whether child protection services are primarily received by children who come into contact with the child protection system for the first time, or those with prior involvement, and whether this differs across the components of the system.

In 2018-19, almost three-quarters (68%) of children receiving services were repeat clients (Figure 5). However, the proportion of repeat clients was substantially higher for those on care and protection orders (94%) and in out-of-home care (94%), while the difference was less pronounced for children in investigations (47% new clients and 53% repeat).

Figure 5: Children receiving child protection services by new and repeat client status, 2018-19 (%)



Source: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Table S2.2.

Children in substantiated cases of abuse or neglect

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

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In 2018-19 there were 47,500 children with substantiated cases of abuse or neglect. This was a rate of 9 per 1,000 children.

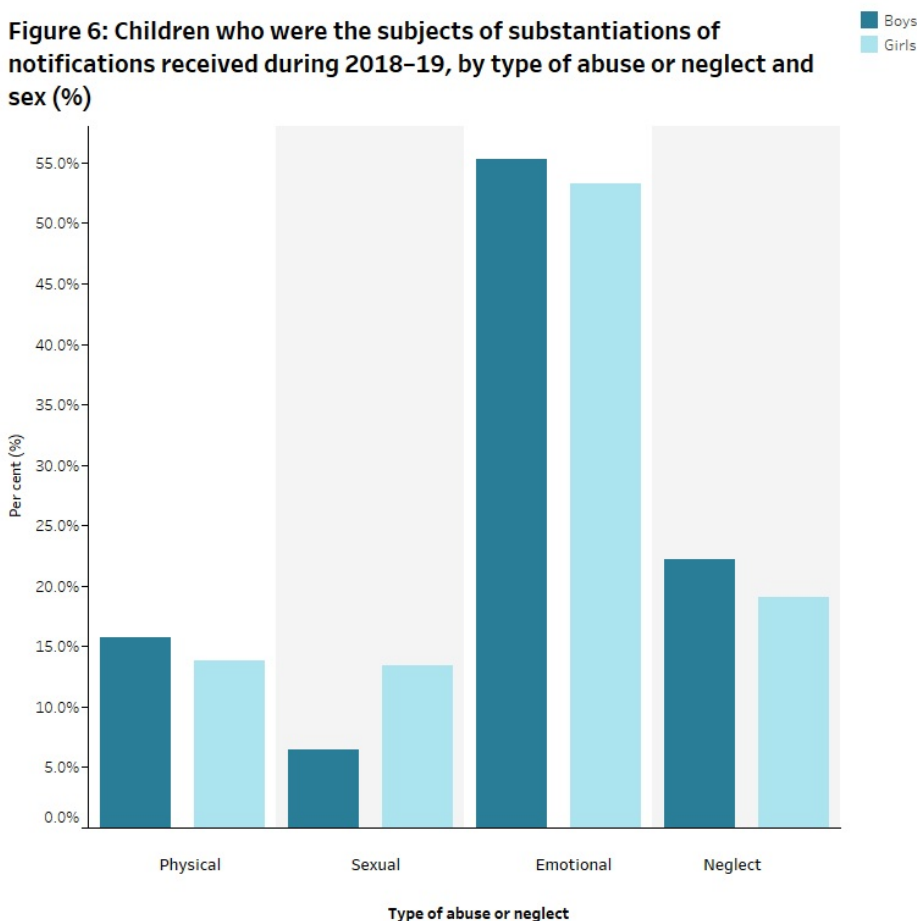
Age

Age is one of the factors that child protection workers consider when processing a notification, determining the type of response and whether a notification will be substantiated.

Children aged under 1 were most likely to be the subjects of substantiations (16 per 1,000 children), while those aged 15-17 were least likely (5 per 1,000).

Type of substantiated abuse/neglect

Figure 6: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2018-19, by type of abuse or neglect and sex (%)



Source: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Table S3.5.

Emotional abuse was the most common substantiated abuse type (54%), followed by neglect (21%), physical abuse (15%) and sexual abuse (10%). Sexual abuse was more common among girls, while neglect and physical abuse were more common among boys. Emotional abuse was similar for both genders (Figure 6).

Remoteness and Socioeconomic areas

Overall, children from *Very remote* areas were almost 3 times as likely as those from *Major Cities* to be the subject of a substantiation (20 per 1,000 children compared with 7 per 1,000 children) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Children who were the subjects of substantiations, by remoteness area, 2018–19 (rate)



	Major cities	Inner regional areas	Outer regional areas	Remote areas	Very remote areas
Number per 1,000	7.4	10.6	10.1	16.2	20.1

Source: Child protection Australia 2018–19, Table S3.7b

Of the children who were the subjects of substantiations in 2018-19, 36% were from the lowest socioeconomic areas. Indigenous children were more likely to be from the lowest socioeconomic areas (43%) compared with non-Indigenous children (33%) (Figure 8).

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Children on care and protection orders

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

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At 30 June 2019, 59,000 or 11 per 1,000 children aged 0-17 were on a care and protection order. Of these children, almost two-thirds (62% or 36,700) were on finalised guardianship or custody orders. Infants (children aged under 1) were most likely to be on interim and temporary orders (61% or 1,000), while children aged 15-17 were most likely to be on finalised guardianship or custody orders (67% or 6,900).

For further information about children on care and protection orders in 2018-19 who also received specialist homelessness services, see *[Specialist homelessness services annual report 2018-19](#)*.

Children admitted to and discharged from orders

In 2018-19, 12,900 children were admitted to care and protection orders. Among this group, three-quarters (9,700 or 75%) were admitted for the first time. Children may be admitted (or re-admitted) to a care and protection order for a number of reasons, including substantiated abuse; irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between the child and their parents; or where parents were unwilling and/or unable to adequately care for the child.

In 2018-19, 11,500 children were discharged from care and protection orders. Of these children, 36% had been continuously on an order for less than 12 months at the time of discharge; 21% spent between 1 and 2 years on an order and 43% were continuously on an order for more than 2 years at the time of discharge (Figure 9).

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Children in out-of-home care

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

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Box 1: National definition of out-of-home care

A nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care has been implemented in 2018-19. Data based on this definition may not match state and territory figures published elsewhere and should not be compared with data published in previous versions of *Child protection Australia*. For more information, see *Child protection Australia 2018-19* Chapter 5.

Children admitted to, and discharged from, out-of-home care

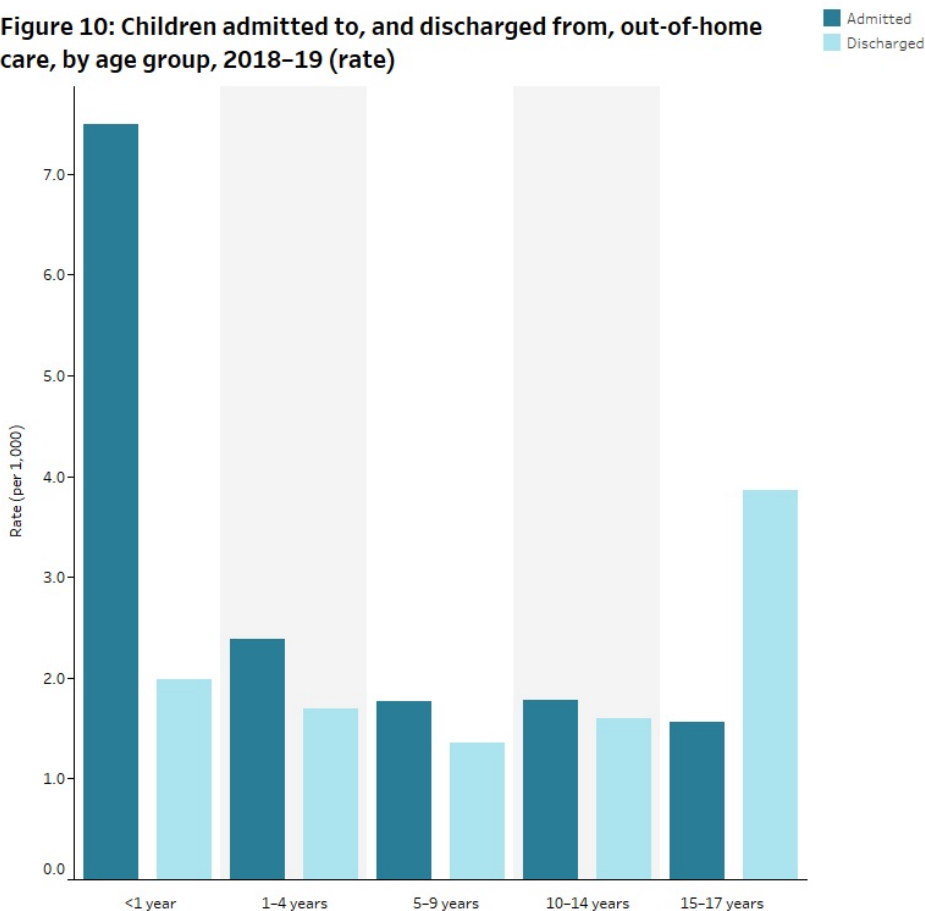
During 2018-19, 12,200 children were admitted to out-of-home care.

The rates of admission were higher for younger children and fell as age increased—7 per 1,000 for infants (children aged less than 1), and 2 per 1,000 for children aged 15-17 (Figure 10).

In comparison, rates of discharges from out-of-home care were highest for children aged 15-17 at 4 per 1,000. The rates for children discharged from out-of-home care across other age groups were similar.

The different age distribution for admissions and discharges reflects children being admitted to out-of-home care at a younger age and remaining there for longer, as well as children leaving out-of-home care once they turn 18.

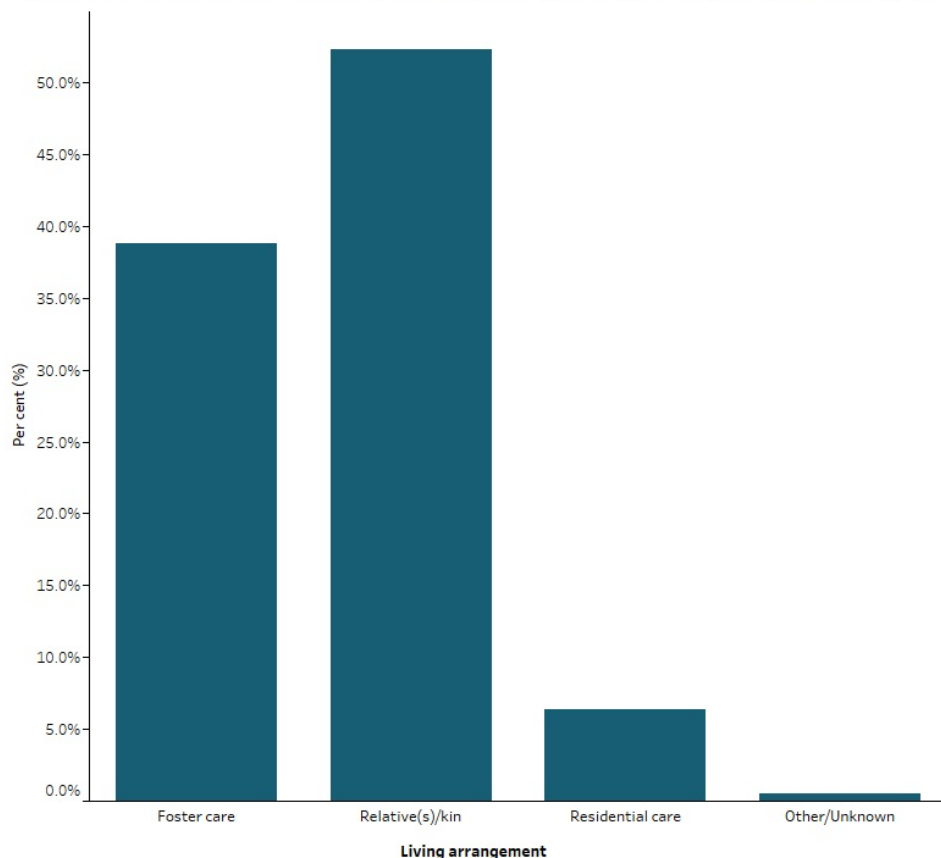
Figure 10: Children admitted to, and discharged from, out-of-home care, by age group, 2018-19 (rate)



Sources: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Tables S5.1 and S5.2.

At 30 June 2019, around 44,900 or 8 per 1,000 children aged 0-17 were in out-of-home care. Of these children, 52% were in relative/kinship care, 39% were in foster care, and 6% were in residential care (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Children in out-of-home care, by living arrangement, 30 June 2019 (%)



Source: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Table S5.3.

Long-term out-of-home care

A child is considered to be in long-term out-of-home care if they have been in their placement continuously for a period of more than 2 years. Of the children who were in care at 30 June 2019, the majority had been in care for 2 years or more (67% or 30,300). This was similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

Reunification and permanent care

Permanency in the context of child protection can vary depending on child and family circumstances. However, the main aim of permanency is to maintain or establish meaningful connections with other caring adults in the child's life such as family, friends, and the community. Once a child is placed in out-of-home care, efforts are focused on reuniting the child with their family if appropriate (reunification), and/or maintaining the stability of their placement (permanency).

In 2018-19, there were about 14,600 children in out-of-home care, excluding those on long-term guardianship or custody orders, for whom reunification was a possibility. Of these children, over 3,700 (25%) were reunified with their family.

Remoteness area

Over half (54%) of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2019 were living in *Major cities* and two-fifths (42%) lived in *Inner* and *Outer regional* areas.

The rates for children in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were twice that of those in *Major cities* for children living in out-of-home care.

The rates of Indigenous children in out-of-home care were much higher across all remoteness areas than the rates for non-Indigenous children (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Children in out-of-home care by remoteness of living arrangement, and Indigenous status, 30 June 2019 (rate)



Source: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Table S5.9b.

Trends in the number of children in out-of-home care

This is the first year that a single nationally consistent definition of out-of-home care has been applied across all states and territories.

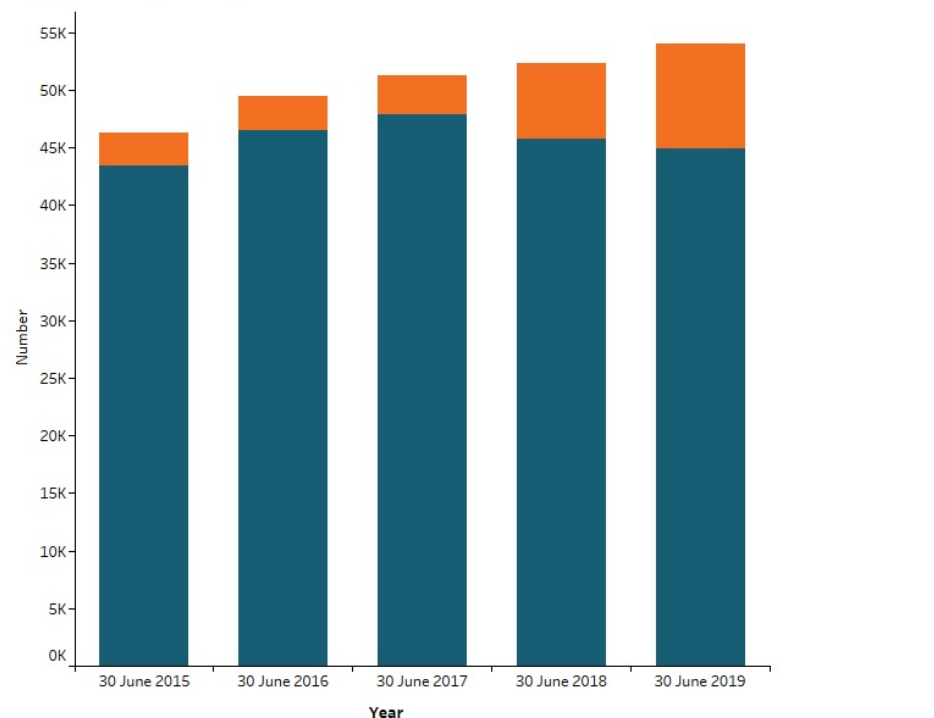
Differences in definitions between jurisdictions in previous years mean that the trend data presented in this chapter must be interpreted with caution.

For further information, refer to *Child protection Australia 2018-19* Chapter 5.

Between 30 June 2015 and 30 June 2017, the number of children in out-of-home care rose by 10% (from 43,400 to 47,900) before falling by 5% to 45,800 in 2018 and then by 2% to 44,900 in 2019 (Figure 13).

The number of children not considered to be in out-of-home care due to being on third-party parental responsibility orders has risen from about 2,900 at 30 June 2015 to almost 9,200 at 30 June 2019 (Figure 13). This increase over time is a reflection of all states and territories gradually adopting definitions of out-of-home care that excluded children on third-party parental responsibility orders.

Figure 13: Children in out-of-home care or not considered to be in out-of-home care due to being on a third-party parental responsibility order, 30 June 2015 to 30 June 2019



Note: Children in out-of-home care presented in this figure are based on jurisdiction-specific definitions of out-of-home care that applied at the respective year as published in previous *Child protection Australia* reports. Due to differences in definitions between jurisdictions and over time, comparisons between years should be made with caution.

Source: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Table T3.

Carers

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

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Carers are people who have been screened and received authorisation to provide placements in their private households for children in funded out-of-home care.

In 2018-19, the vast majority of children in out-of-home care were placed in home-based care (41,400 or 92%), primarily with relatives/kin (52% or 23,500) or foster carers (39% or 17,400).

About 14,600 carer households had 1 or more children placed with them at 30 June 2019. Of these, 58% (8,400) had only one child placed, 26% (3,800) had 2 children placed and 17% (2,500) had 3 or more children placed (Figure 14).

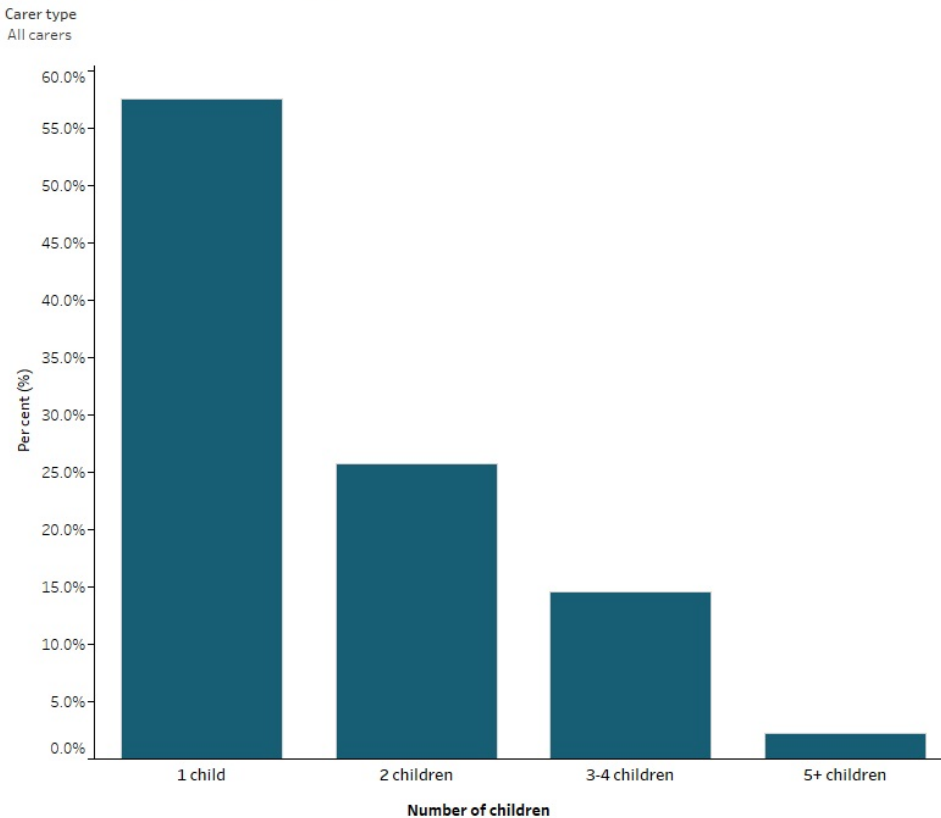
Foster carer households

Around 9,100 foster care households had 1 or more foster care children placed with them at 30 June 2019. Of these, 48% (4,400) had only one child placed, 30% (2,700) had 2 children placed and 22% (2,000) had 3 or more children placed (Figure 14).

Relative/kinship carer households

About 14,500 relative/kinship carer households had 1 or more children placed with them at 30 June 2019. Of these, 62% (9,000) had only one child placed, 24% (3,500) had 2 children placed and 14% (2,000) had 3 or more children placed (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Carer households with a placement, by type of carer and number of children placed, 2018-19 (%)



Sources: *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Table S7.1, S7.2, S7.3.



Child protection Australia dashboard

During 2018-19, 170,200 (30 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 3,700 children were reunified with family during 2018-19.

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Related material

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Data

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