

Child protection Australia 2021-22

Web report | Last updated: 20 Feb 2024 | Topic: [Child protection](#) | [Media release](#)

About

This report (released 6 June 2023) provides an overview of children in the child protection system in 2021-22, including children subject to notifications, investigations, and substantiations of maltreatment, and the ways children were supported. Over the next 12 months, quarterly updates will be made to the report to include content specifically focussing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the system, the safety of children in care and pathways from out-of-home care.

[Safety of children in care](#) (released 19 September 2023) presents data on the safety and abuse of children in care.

The update presents data on [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#) in the child protection system (released 20 February 2024).

Cat. no: CWS 92

- [Appendices](#)
- [Technical notes](#)
- [Technical specifications](#)
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Findings from this report:

- [In 2021-22, about 178,000 children came into contact with the system, a decrease from about 179,000 in 2020-21](#)
 - [Between 2017-18 and 2021-22, the rate of children with substantiations remained relatively stable around 8 per 1,000](#)
 - [Since 2016-17, 4 out of 5 children who were reunified with their family did not return to care in the next 12 months.](#)
 - [Compared to 2020-21, the number of children with a substantiation of abuse in care decreased by 6% from 1,300 to 1,200](#)
-

Child protection system in Australia

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Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful practices against children (UNICEF 2021). When children cannot live safely at home, child protection systems prioritise children’s physical, mental and psychosocial needs to safeguard their lives and futures (UNICEF 2021). Child protection functions to protect the fundamental rights of children which include safety, freedom from violence and a stable family environment (UN General Assembly 1989).

The child protection system aims to protect children from maltreatment in family settings.

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (WHO 2020).

In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for statutory child protection. Relevant departments support vulnerable children:

- who have been, or are at risk of being, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed
- whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

This report looks at children aged under 18 years who came into contact with the child protection system in 2021-22. This includes being:

- subjects of investigations for alleged child maltreatment notifications
- on a care and protection order, which gives child protection departments partial or full legal responsibility for their welfare
- in out-of-home care as they were unable to live at home due to child safety concerns.

Children in the child protection system

In 2021-22, around 1 in 32 (178,000) Australian children aged under 18 came into contact with the child protection system (see: Data table 2.2). About 1 in 124 (45,500) Australian children aged under 18 became subjects of substantiated maltreatment (see: Supplementary data table S3.3). That is, an investigation concluded that they were being, or were at risk of being, maltreated.

A summary of children by components of the child protection system is outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Summary of children in the child protection system, 2021-22

Component of the child protection system	Description	Number of events	Number of children
Notifications of alleged maltreatment	A report made to a child protection department alleging child maltreatment or harm to a child (Notifications do not count as a contact with the system until an investigation is undertaken)	471,000	275,000
Notifications resolved by means other than an investigation	For children who were assessed as having low risk of harm, notifications made about them were resolved without an investigation, such as by providing advice or referring to services (These notifications do not count as a contact with the system)	292,000	152,000
Investigations of alleged maltreatment notifications	Child protection departments obtain more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification and make an assessment about the harm or degree of harm to the child and their protective needs	178,000	119,000
Substantiated maltreatment	An investigation concluded that a child had been, was being, or was at risk or significant risk of being, maltreated	61,900	45,500

Not substantiated allegation of maltreatment	An investigation concluded that there was no reasonable cause to suspect prior, current or future maltreatment of a child	73,300	55,300
Investigation in process	An investigation that began for a notification received in the financial year, but was not completed by 31 August the following year	34,300	12,200
Care and protection orders	Legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare	39,800	72,300
Out-of-home care placements	Overnight care for children for which there is ongoing case management and financial payment	116,000	55,800
Child protection system	Includes children who were subjects of investigation, on a care and protection order and/or in out-of-home care	334,000	178,000

Notes

1. Number of events includes the total occurrences of the specific component of the child protection system.
2. For the Number of children count, a child is counted only once, even if they had multiple occurrences of the event during the year.
3. For care and protection orders, the number of events are orders that were issued in 2021-22, while the number of children are those who had an ongoing care and protection order during 2021-22.
4. For readability, numbers have been rounded.

Sources: Data tables 2.2, supplementary data tables S3.1, S3.3, S4.1, T1, unpublished data, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2021-22.

Nationally, focus is increasingly on early intervention and family support services to:

- help prevent children entering or returning to the child protection system
- minimise the need for more intrusive interventions (AIHW 2021; Bromfield & Holzer 2008; DSS 2021).

Most jurisdictions have enacted strategies that help families in a more holistic way, by:

- coordinating family support service delivery
- providing better access to different types of child and family services (DSS 2021).

More information on the performance of governments in providing child protection services across Australia can be found in the [Report on Government Services 2023](#).

Impact of COVID-19

Measures put in place as part of government responses to COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 (including travel bans/restrictions, lockdowns limiting non-urgent face-to-face work, remote learning for students and quarantine requirements) may have affected child protection processes during 2019-20 to 2021-22. The long-term impact of COVID-19 on child protection processes is still unknown. No specific impacts on the annual data are highlighted in this report, however effects may become apparent in future years.

Some potential impacts of COVID-19 on Australian children in child protection are explored in [Child protection in the time of COVID-19](#). The report presents monthly child protection data from March 2020 to September 2020 compared with 2019. It contains selected information on risk factors for child abuse, including income and housing stress, parental mental health, substance use, and domestic violence.

For information on the impact of COVID-19 on population data, see Box 1.1 in the [Technical notes](#).

Where do I go for more information?

For more information on this topic, see [Child protection, state and territory departments responsible for child protection and Department of Social Services](#).

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2021) *National framework for protecting Australia's children indicators*, Catalogue number CWS 62, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 February 2023.

Bromfield L & Holzer P (2008) *A National Approach for Child Protection: Project Report*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Government, accessed 6 February 2023.

DSS (Commonwealth of Australia Department of Social Services) (2021) *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*, DSS, Australian Government, accessed 6 February 2023.

UN General Assembly (United Nations) (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UN General Assembly, accessed 6 February 2023.

UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) (2021) *Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030*, UNICEF, accessed 6 February 2023.

WHO (World Health Organization) (2020) *Child maltreatment*, WHO, accessed 6 February 2023.





Insights

The process of determining child maltreatment: Key findings

In 2021-22, 275,000 children were subjects of notifications of alleged maltreatment. In 2021-22, 119,000 children became subjects of investigations. In 2021-22, 45,500 children in finalised investigations were subjects of substantiations of maltreatment.

Supporting children: Key findings

In 2021-22, 36,200 children commenced intensive family support services. At 30 June 2022, 61,100 children were on care and protection orders. At 30 June 2022, 45,400 children were in out-of-home care.



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Key findings

In 2021-22,

- 275,000 children were subjects of notifications of alleged maltreatment.
- 119,000 children became subjects of investigations.
- 45,500 children in finalised investigations were subjects of substantiations of maltreatment.

Notifications, investigations, and substantiations are the entry point for children into the child protection system. These components are sequential:

1. An initial notification of alleged child maltreatment is made to a child protection department.
2. If the notification meets the threshold for further action, an investigation of the alleged maltreatment is conducted.
3. The investigation ends with a substantiation decision about whether there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been, is being, or is at risk or significant risk of being, maltreated.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the notifications, investigations, and substantiations components of the child protection system.

The data in this section relate to children for whom notifications were made about them to child protection departments between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022.

Due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report on notifications, investigations and substantiations, data are not comparable between jurisdictions. Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on differences in jurisdictions' policy and practice.

How many children were subjects of notifications and investigations?

In 2021-22, 275,000 children were subjects of notifications (49 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table T1).

The most common sources of notifications were:

- school personnel (25% or 67,600)
- police (24% or 65,200)
- medical or health personnel (11% or 29,900).

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

The child protection collection contains more than one notification where it relates to different events of alleged maltreatment, or a different person believed responsible. Of children who were subjects of notifications:

- about two-thirds (67% or 185,000) had a notification made about them for one event of alleged child maltreatment
- about one-third (33% or 89,800) were subjects of 2 or more notifications for different events of alleged child maltreatment.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

In 2021-22, more than half (55% or 152,000) of children were assessed as having low risk of harm and therefore notifications made about them were resolved without an investigation. Of these:

- more than half (55% or 83,100) did not require further action as they were not at risk of potential or actual harm
- about one-third (33% or 50,000) were provided with advice or referred to other services
- about 13% (19,300) required other intervention, for example, in cases where children were assessed as low risk but still in need.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

About 43% (119,000) of children for whom notifications were made about them became subjects of investigations. Of these:

- the majority (85% or 101,000) had a finalised investigation with an outcome of either substantiated (45% or 45,500) or not substantiated (55% or 55,300)

- about 10% (12,200) had an investigation in process
- about 5% (6,000) had an investigation closed with no outcome possible, for example, in cases where families have relocated.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.3

In 2021-22, about 1,300 children were awaiting an assessment decision on whether to undertake an investigation.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

How many children were subjects of substantiated maltreatment?

In 2021-22, about 45% (45,500) of children in finalised investigations were subjects of substantiations of maltreatment (see: Supplementary data table S3.3). Of these:

- 13,600 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (40 per 1,000 Indigenous children)
- 30,500 were non-Indigenous children (5.7 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Source: Supplementary data table S3.9

The higher rate of Indigenous children in child protection substantiations is complex, and may have been affected by:

- the legacy of past policies of forced removal
- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- a higher likelihood of living in the lowest socioeconomic areas
- perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing (HREOC 1997).

More information on Indigenous children will be included in the report over the coming months.

Characteristics of children with substantiated maltreatment

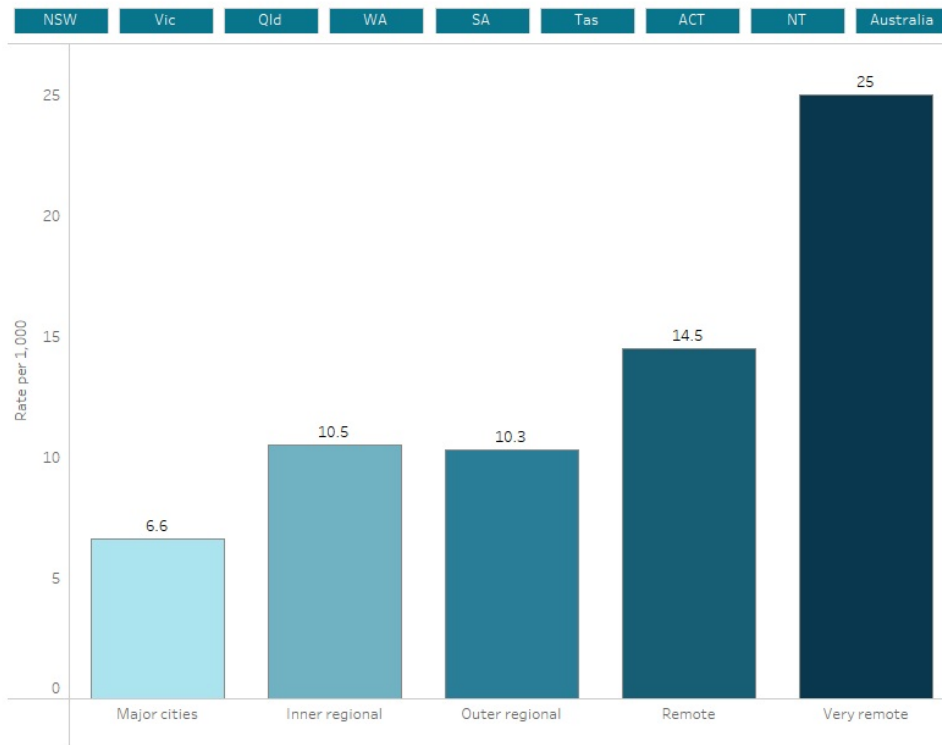
For children who were subjects of substantiations:

- about 81% (36,900) had only one substantiation (see: Supplementary data table S3.4)
- about 51% (23,000) were girls and about 47% (21,600) were boys (see: Supplementary data table S3.5)
- emotional abuse was the most common type of maltreatment (57% or 25,900), followed by neglect (21% or 9,400) (see: Supplementary data table S3.5)
- children living in very remote areas (25 per 1,000) were almost 4 times more likely to be maltreated than children living in major cities (6.6 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table S3.7)
- about one-third (33% or 15,100) were from the lowest socioeconomic areas (see: Supplementary data table S3.8)
- infants aged under one were more likely to be maltreated than any other age group (15 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table S3.13).

Figure 1: Characteristics of children with substantiated maltreatment, by state or territory, 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children with substantiated maltreatment disaggregated by abuse type, age group, remoteness, and sex in the year 2021-22. Data are displayed for each state or territory and Australia.

- Categories
- Abuse type (per cent)
 - Age group (rate)
 - Remoteness (rate)
 - Sex (per cent)



Note: Some remoteness areas are not found in all states and territories.

Sources: Supplementary data tables S3.5, S3.6, and S3.7.

Has the number of children in the system changed over time?

From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the rate of children who were:

- in the child protection system increased from 29 per 1,000 to 31 per 1,000
- subjects of notifications increased from 44 per 1,000 to 49 per 1,000
- subjects of substantiations remained relatively stable from 8.5 per 1,000 to 8.0 per 1,000.

Source: Supplementary data table T1

While notifications increased, the rates for substantiations remained steady across these timeframes. This could be a result of:

- legislative changes, such as the expansion of the list of occupations that is mandated to report cases of suspected child maltreatment
- increased public awareness from inquiries into child protection processes.

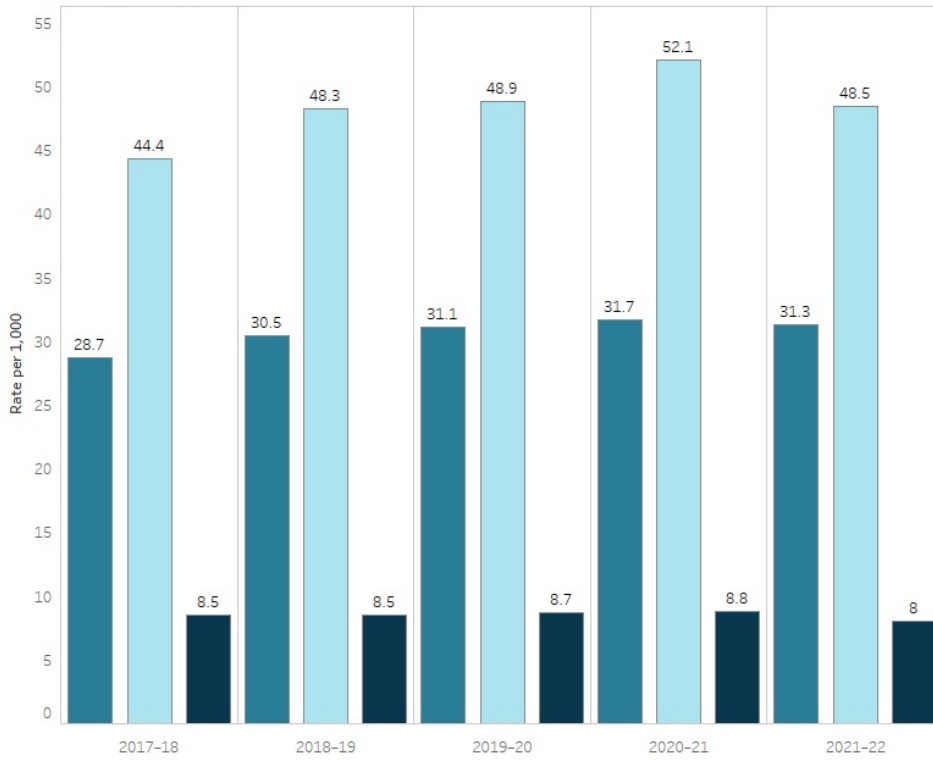
Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on legislative changes and various inquiries into the child protection system.

Figure 2: Number of children in different components of child protection, 2017-18 to 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a substantiated maltreatment assessment in 2021-22, by primary and other types of abuse or neglect. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Categories

- Child protection system
- Subjects of notifications
- Subjects of substantiations



Note: New South Wales provided limited substantiations data in 2017-18 due to the implementation of a new client management system. Therefore, substantiations rates for 2017-18 have been calculated excluding New South Wales and should not be compared with rates in other reporting periods.
Source: Table T1.

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Key findings

- In 2021-22, 36,200 children commenced intensive family support services.
- At 30 June 2022, 61,100 children were on care and protection orders.
- At 30 June 2022, 45,400 children were in out-of-home care.

Child protection departments provide and/or fund a range of services to support children in the child protection system to ensure they have stable, long-term care arrangements. These include:

- intensive family support services
- care and protection orders
- out-of-home care.

Intensive family support services

What is the role of intensive family support services?

Child protection departments may also work to strengthen families with referrals to intensive family support services at any time for advice, education, and support.

In 2021-22, 36,200 children commenced intensive family support services. Of these, about 3 in 5 (63% or 22,800) were aged under 15 (see: Data table 8.1).

These services aim to:

- support parents to care for their children
- prevent separation of children from parents
- achieve reunification where separation has already occurred.

More information on intensive family support services, including government expenditure, can be found in the [Report on Government Services 2023](#).

Care and protection orders

What is a care and protection order?

Care and protection orders are legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare. Children can be placed on care and protection orders for various reasons, including:

- having been seriously harmed
- being at risk or significant risk of harm
- having no other care options.

The 3 main categories of legal responsibility conferred by care and protection orders include arrangements where:

- parents retain legal responsibility
- departments are given legal responsibility
- nominated carers are given legal responsibility.

A substantiated notification of maltreatment does not necessarily mean that a child will be placed on an order. In 2020-21, just over one-fifth (22% or 11,200) of children who were subjects of substantiations were subsequently placed on an order within 12 months following substantiation (see: Supplementary data table S4.2).

In cases where parents have made changes to ensure their children’s safety and wellbeing at home, or are prepared to do so, the department may decide an order is unnecessary and consider other options, including:

- referring the family to support services
- putting a safety plan in place
- determining that no further action is needed.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the different types of care and protection orders.

How many children were on care and protection orders?

At 30 June 2022, 61,100 children were on care and protection orders (11 per 1,000). Of these:

- 24,600 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (72 per 1,000 Indigenous children)
- 36,500 were non-Indigenous children (6.8 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Source: Supplementary data table S4.9

In 2021-22, around 10,600 children were admitted to care and protection orders (see: Supplementary data table S4.3). Of these:

- about three-quarters (76% or 8,100) were admitted for the first time (see: Data table 4.2)
- over one-quarter (28% or 3,000) were aged 1-4 years (see: Supplementary data table S4.3).

More (11,700) children were discharged from care and protection orders. Of these, about one-fifth were continuously on an order:

- between one to 2 years (21% or 2,500)
- for 8 years or more (21% or 2,400).

Source: Supplementary data table S4.4

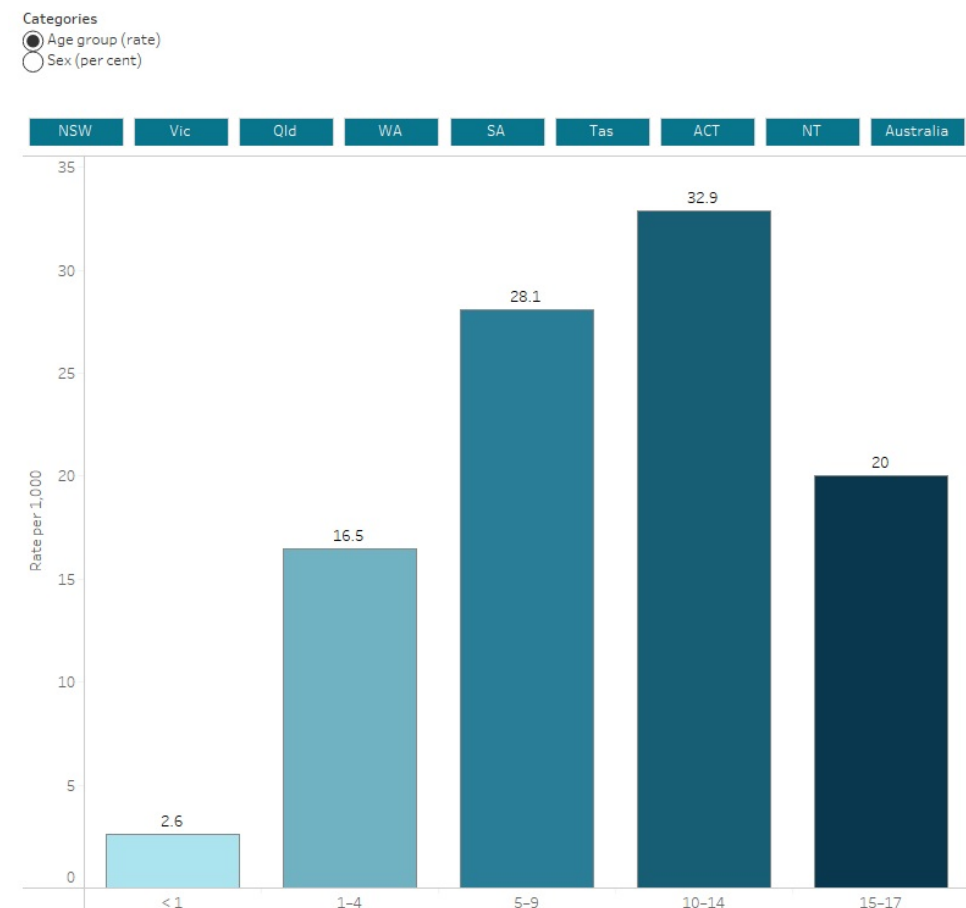
Characteristics of children on care and protection orders

For children who were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2022:

- 2 in 5 (40% or 24,300) were living with relatives/kin in home-based care (see: Supplementary data table S4.5)
- about one-third (33% or 20,100) were aged 10-14 years (see: Supplementary data table S4.6)
- about 3 in 5 (63% or 38,600) were on finalised guardianship or custody orders (see: Supplementary data table S4.10).

Figure 3: Characteristics of children on care and protection orders, by state or territory, 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children on care and protection orders disaggregated by age group and sex in the year 2021-22. Data are displayed for each state or territory and Australia.



Sources: Supplementary data tables S4.7 and S4.8.

Has the number of children on care and protection orders changed over time?

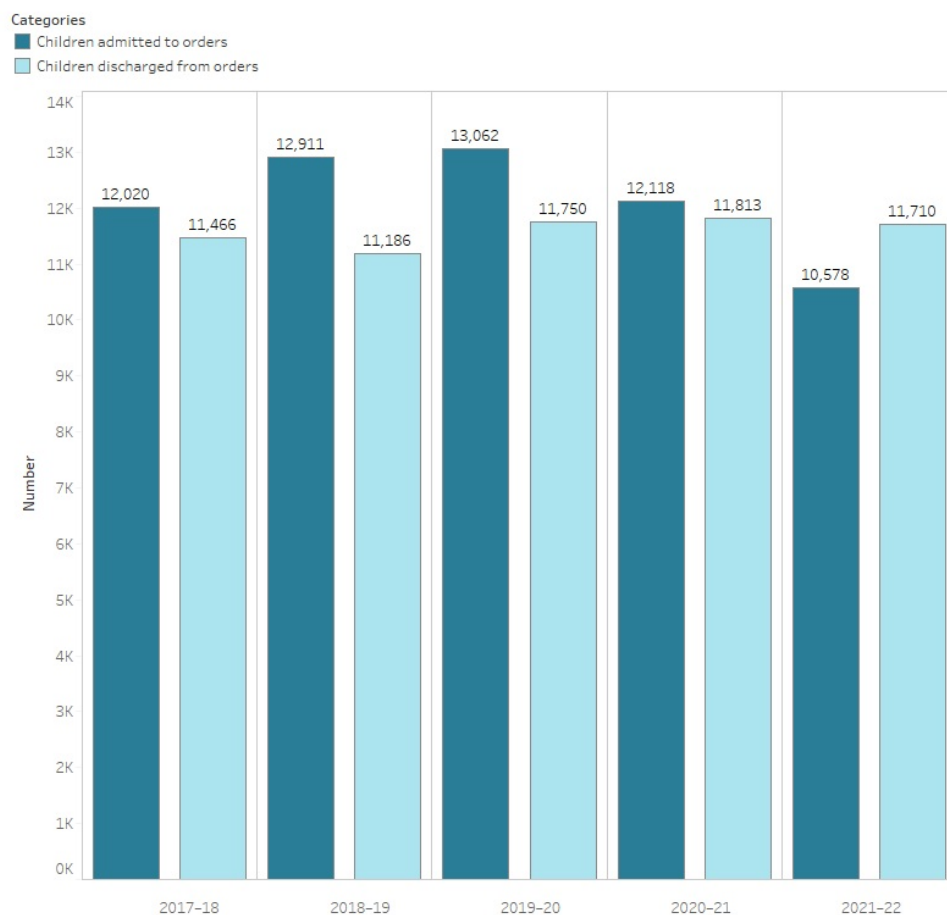
Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the rate of children on care and protection orders remained steady, at around 10 per 1,000 to 11 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data table T1).

From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the number of children:

- admitted to orders decreased from about 12,000 to about 10,600 children (see: Supplementary data table S4.11)
- discharged from orders remained stable, from about 11,500 to about 11,700 (see: Supplementary data table S4.12).

Figure 4: Children admitted to and discharged from care and protection orders, 2017-18 to 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows trends in the number of children admitted to and discharged from care and protection orders between 2017-18 and 2021-22.



Sources: Supplementary data tables S4.11 and S4.12.

Out-of-home care

What is out-of-home care?

Out-of-home care is overnight care for children aged under 18 who are unable to live with their families due to child safety concerns. This includes placements approved by the child protection department for which there is ongoing case management and financial payment (including where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer). This nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care was implemented in 2018-19.

Out-of-home care includes:

- legal (court-ordered) placements
- voluntary placements
- placements made for the purpose of providing respite for parents and/or carers.

Children are placed in out-of-home care for many reasons, including:

- being the subjects of substantiations and needing a protective environment
- having parents who are incapable of providing adequate care
- needing alternative accommodation during times of conflict
- having parents or carers who need respite.

Consistent with the principle of keeping children with their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so, out-of-home care placements are considered as a last resort.

The national definition for out-of-home care excludes children on third-party parental responsibility orders as the minister or executive no longer has guardianship of children on these orders. However, all states and territories continue to fund carers of children on third-party parental responsibility orders and some (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) continue to provide some level of case management.

As at 30 June 2022, there were about 10,200 children on third-party parental responsibility orders (see: Supplementary data table T3). Children on third-party parental responsibility orders are considered to have achieved a more permanent arrangement.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the different types of out-of-home care placements.

How many children were in out-of-home care?

As at 30 June 2022, 45,400 children were in out-of-home care (8.0 per 1,000) (see: Data table 5.1). Of these:

- 19,400 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (57 per 1,000 Indigenous children)
- 25,900 were non-Indigenous children (4.8 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

Source: Supplementary data table S5.5

In 2021-22, the rates of children admitted and discharged from out-of-home care were around 2.0 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data tables S5.1 and S5.2). Nationally:

- 10,300 children were admitted to out-of-home care (see: Supplementary data table S5.1)
- 11,000 children were discharged from out-of-home care (see: Supplementary data table S5.2).

Children in the youngest age group (under one) had the highest admission rate of 6.7 per 1,000 compared with less than 2.0 per 1,000 for other age groups (see: Supplementary data table S5.1).

The discharge rate was highest for children in the oldest age group (15-17 years) at 4.4 per 1,000 compared with less than 2.0 per 1,000 for other age groups (see: Supplementary data table S5.2).

Characteristics of children in out-of-home care

For children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2022:

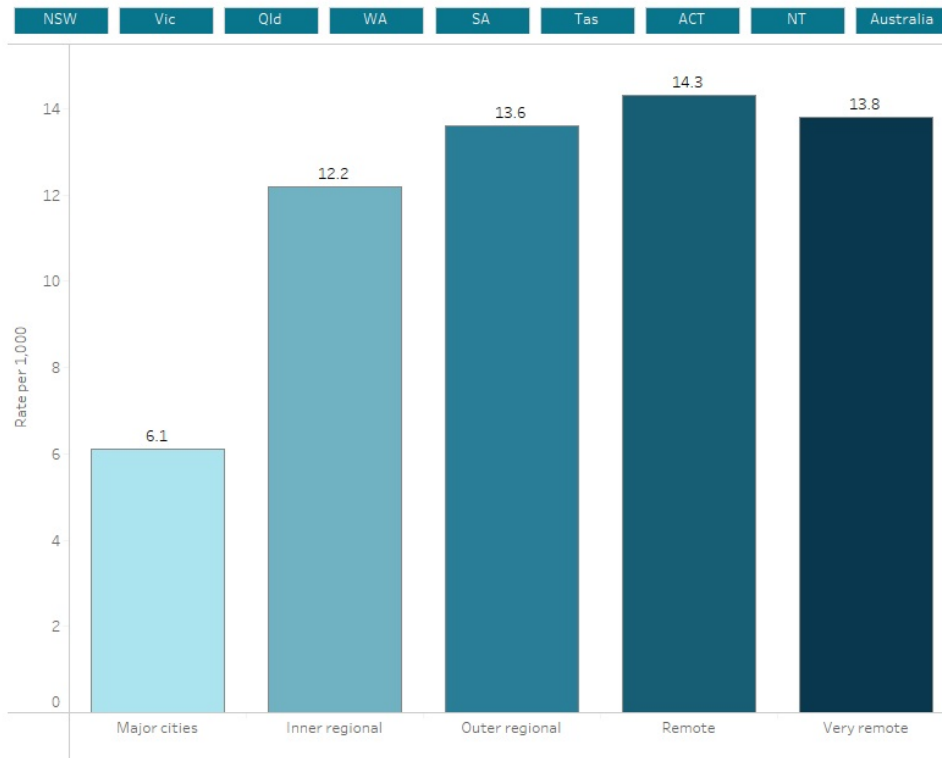
- about 90% (40,900) were in home-based care (foster care, relative/kinship care and other home-based care) (see: Supplementary data table S5.3)
- about 3 in 5 (61% or 27,900) children were aged 5-14 years (see: Supplementary data table S5.5)
- disability status was known for 71% (32,300) of children in care, of whom 29% (9,300) had a disability (see: Supplementary data table S5.8)
- the rate of children living in inner and outer regional (13 per 1,000) and remote and very remote (14 per 1,000) areas were more than twice that of those living in major cities (6.1 per 1,000) (see: Supplementary data table S5.9)
- most (95% or 42,900) were on a care and protection order (see: Supplementary data table S5.13).

Figure 5: Characteristics of children in out-of-home care, by state or territory, 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children in out-of-home care disaggregated by age group, placement type, remoteness, and sex in the year 2021-22. Data are displayed for each state or territory and Australia.

Categories

- Age group (per cent)
- Placement type (per cent)
- Remoteness (rate)
- Sex (per cent)



Sources: Supplementary data tables S5.3, S5.5, S5.6, and S5.9.

Characteristics of children in long-term out-of-home care

In 2021-22, 70% (31,700) of children in out-of-home care had been in care for 2 years or more, known as long-term care (see: Supplementary data table S5.15). Of these:

- about 69% (21,800) were aged 5-14 years (see: Supplementary data table S5.15)
- about 81% (25,800) were on a long-term guardianship arrangement (see: Supplementary data table S5.16).

Has the number of children in out-of-home care changed over time?

Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the number of children in out-of-home care fluctuated each year, but overall, the rate has remained relatively stable around 8.0 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data table T1).

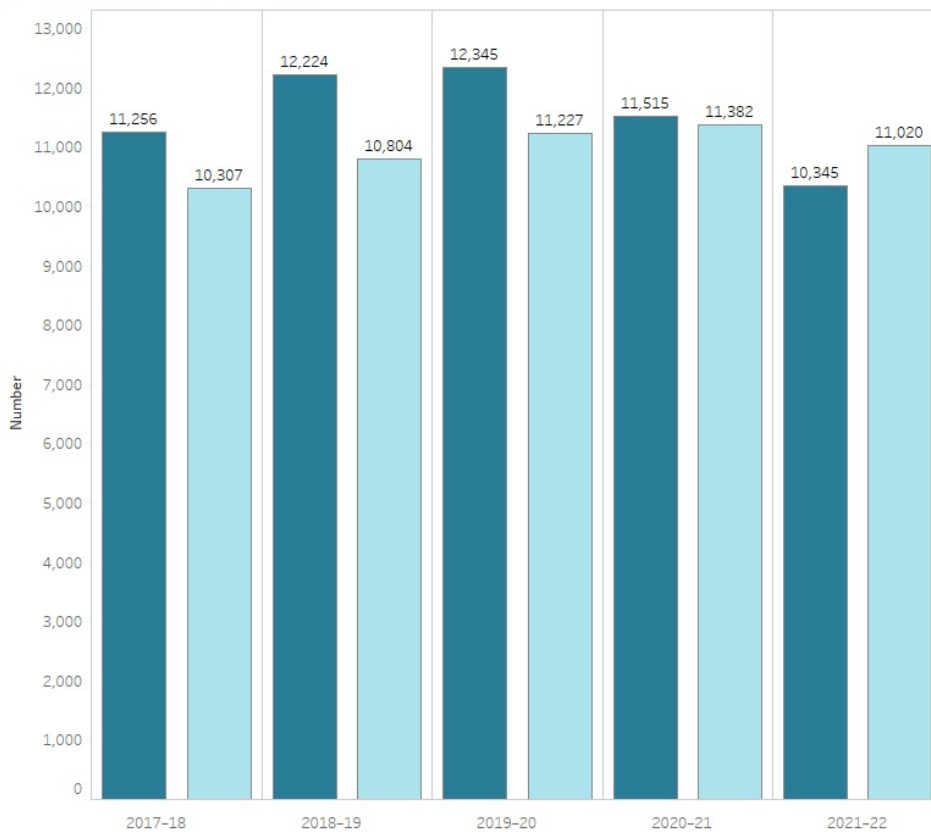
Similarly, from 2017-18 to 2021-22, the number of children admitted and discharged from care changed somewhat each year, but the overall rates remained relatively stable at about 2.0 per 1,000 (see: Supplementary data tables S5.17 and S5.19).

Figure 6: Children admitted to and discharged from out-of-home care, 2017-18 to 2021-22

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017 to 2022, by caregiver type, and where children are placed with relatives/kin, the relationship of relative or kin carer. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Categories

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



Source: Supplementary data tables S5.18 and S5.19.

What types of carers are there?

Carers are people who have been assessed and approved by the relevant department or agency to provide care in their private households for children in funded and non-funded out-of-home care.

The main types of carers include:

- foster carers who are not related to the child
- relative/kinship carers who are related to or know the child
- long-term guardianship carers who may or may not be related to the child
- respite carers who provide short-term accommodation where the intention is for the child to return to their prior residence (out-of-home care or family home).

How many children were placed in unique carer households?

The reporting of the total number of unique carer households can give insight into the total number of children placed in the household, regardless of the placement type, as some carer households might be approved/authorised to provide more than one care type.

It also allows information about carer households that provide placements other than foster or relative/kinship care to be included in the count.

As at 30 June 2022, there were about 24,200 unique carer households with a placement. Of these:

- more than half (59% or 14,300) had one child placed with them
- about 39% (9,500) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 2.0% (500) had 5 or more children placed with them.

Source: Supplementary data table S7.1

How many children were placed with foster or relative/kinship carers?

As at 30 June, there were about 8,700 foster carer households with one or more children placed with them. Of these:

- about half (51% or 4,400) had one child placed with them
- about 46% (4,000) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 3.3% (300) had 5 or more children placed with them.

Source: Supplementary data table S7.2

As at 30 June, there were about 15,500 relative/kinship carer households with one or more children placed with them. Of these:

- almost two-thirds (64% or 9,900) had one child placed with them
- over one-third (35% or 5,500) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 1.2% (200) had 5 or more children placed with them.

Source: Supplementary data table S7.3

The prevalence of households with multiple child placements might reflect that, in many jurisdictions, priority is given to placing siblings together.

How many children were new or repeat clients?

In 2021-22, 178,000 children aged under 18 years came into contact with the child protection system (see: Data table 2.2). Of these, the majority (70% or 123,000) of children were repeat (which also includes continuing) clients (see: Supplementary data table S2.2).

Repeat clients are children who have previously been in contact with the child protection system. These include children:

- who have been the subject of an investigation
- were discharged from any type of national care and protection order or funded out-of-home care placement (excluding respite placements lasting less than 7 days)
- whose earliest order and/or placement in the current reporting period is part of a preceding continuous episode of care.

Data on new and repeat clients provide some insight into the extent to which new clients, or those with prior involvement, come into contact with the child protection system, and whether this differs across the system components.

In 2021-22:

- More than half (55% or 65,000) of the 119,000 children who were subjects of investigations for alleged child maltreatment notifications were repeat clients.
- Most (96% or 69,300) of the 72,300 children on a care and protection order were repeat clients.
- Most (95% or 53,200) of the 55,800 children placed in out-of-home care were repeat clients.

Source: Supplementary data table S2.2

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on the child protection system.

How safe were children in care?

Sometimes children in out-of-home care can be the subject of further abuse, for example, by their carer or another person in the household or care facility.

In 2021-22, 1,200 children were subjects of substantiations of abuse in care.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

More information on the safety and abuse of children in care will be included in the report over the coming months.

How were children supported to transition out of care?

To support children to find stable long-term care arrangements, child protection departments undertake permanency planning for children in out-of-home care.

Permanency outcomes include:

- reunifying children with their families
- placing children in a third-party care arrangement
- placing children on long-term guardianship or custody orders
- adoption.

In 2021-22, 9,000 children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome.

Source: Unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection

More information on children's transition from out-of-home care will be included in the report over the coming months.

References

HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) (1997), *Bringing them home: Report of the national inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, HREOC, accessed 6 February 2023.



Safety of children in care

Key findings

In 2021-22:

About 1,200 children were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care

Most children abused in care were aged 10-14 (40%) or 15 and over (25%)

Physical abuse was the most common type of abuse (32%)





Safety of children in care

Children in care can experience further abuse or neglect, for example, by their carer or another person in the household or care facility. When children are in care, notifications of suspected abuse in care are investigated. This report refers to those situations where a child in care was subject to a new substantiation. New substantiations occur when there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had been, was being, or was at risk of being, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed.

The scope and source of the safety in care data in this report are different to those in the [Report on Government Services 2023 \(Part F, Section 16\)](#), so direct comparisons cannot be made between the 2 reports.

This report is primarily a data report. As such, it can at times appear to depersonalise some of the pain and suffering behind the statistics. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) would like to acknowledge the serious impact and huge burden that child abuse can have on those affected. It can inflict physical injury, psychological trauma and emotional suffering. These effects can last a lifetime and can affect future generations. It is our endeavour that, by bringing together the available data, we can strengthen the evidence to build a more coherent picture of abuse in care in Australia. This information will help to inform government policies and practice and assist in the planning and delivery of prevention and intervention programs.

Safety of children in care

In the context of state and territory child protection systems, 'abuse in care' refers to the abuse of children (including those at risk of abuse) aged under 18 who are in out-of-home care, on third party parental responsibility orders, or on other orders that transfer full or partial parental responsibility for the child to an authority of the state or territory. It can involve physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

States and territories have different processes, data systems and record keeping methods for substantiations of abuse in care, which substantially impacts the comparability of data across jurisdictions. As such, abuse in care reporting may include instances where the person held responsible is:

- a. the approved carer
- b. another person living in the household or care facility, including other children
- c. an employee of the responsible care service/agency or government department
- d. a person not living in the household, where a person in (a) or (c) failed to protect the child, or the action or inaction of a person in (a) or (c) contributed to the abuse.

This report includes data on cases of abuse in care where:

- A substantiation was recorded between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2022. This may include historical cases where the abuse occurred before 1 July 2021. Historical cases may include children who were in care at the time the abuse occurred, but subsequently exited care before the date of the substantiation (for example, the 2021-22 substantiations data may include children who exited care before 2021-22).
- The child was aged under 18 at the time of the abuse. This may include cases where the child was older at the date of substantiation.

Safety of children in care

In 2021-22, about 1,200 children in Australia were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care. Of these children:

- 52% (640) were girls and 47% (580) were boys
- 46% (570) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 40% (495) were aged 10-14 at the time of substantiation.

Sources: Supplementary data tables S9.2, S9.5 and S9.6.

The number of children abused in care in the youngest and oldest age groups differed between boys and girls.

- More than half (57% or 74) of children aged under 5 who were abused in care were boys, compared with 43% (55) who were girls.
- Girls (61% or 190) aged 15 and over were more likely to be abused in care than boys (37% or 110) in the same age group (Figure 1).

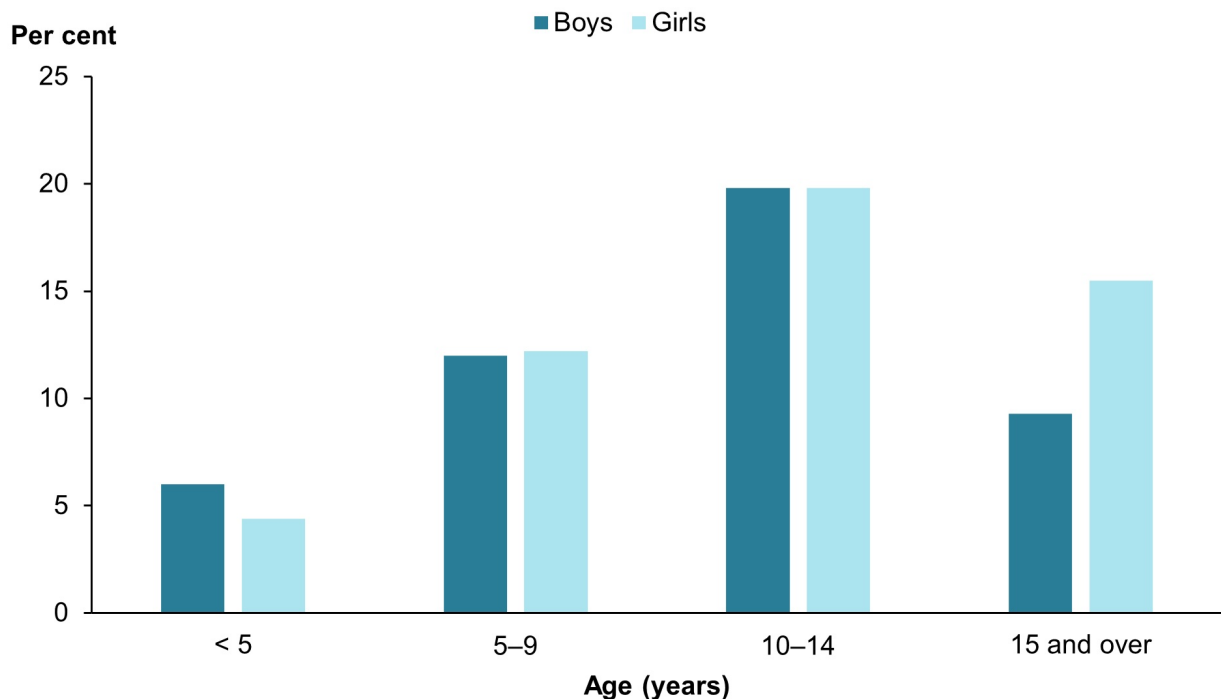
Source: Supplementary data table S9.7.

Similar proportions (about 50%) of boys and girls aged 5-9 and 10-14 were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care.

- For children aged 5-9 who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care, about 150 were boys and about 150 were girls.
- 245 boys and 245 girls aged 10-14 were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care (Figure 1).

Source: Supplementary data table S9.7.

Figure 1: Children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care, by age and sex, 2021-22



Note: Age is based on the child's age on the date the substantiation was recorded, not age at the time the abuse occurred. As such, the '15 and over' category may include children who were under 18 at the time of abuse, but were aged 18 and over at the time of substantiation.

Source: Supplementary data table S9.7.

Type of abuse

The type of abuse presented in this section is the 'primary' type of abuse or neglect - the type of abuse that is considered most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term.

In 2021-22, physical abuse was the most common primary type of abuse for all children in care (32% or about 390), followed by emotional abuse (29% or about 365).

Source: Supplementary data table S9.3.

For boys (580), the most common forms of abuse were:

- physical abuse (36% or 210)
- emotional abuse (28% or 160).

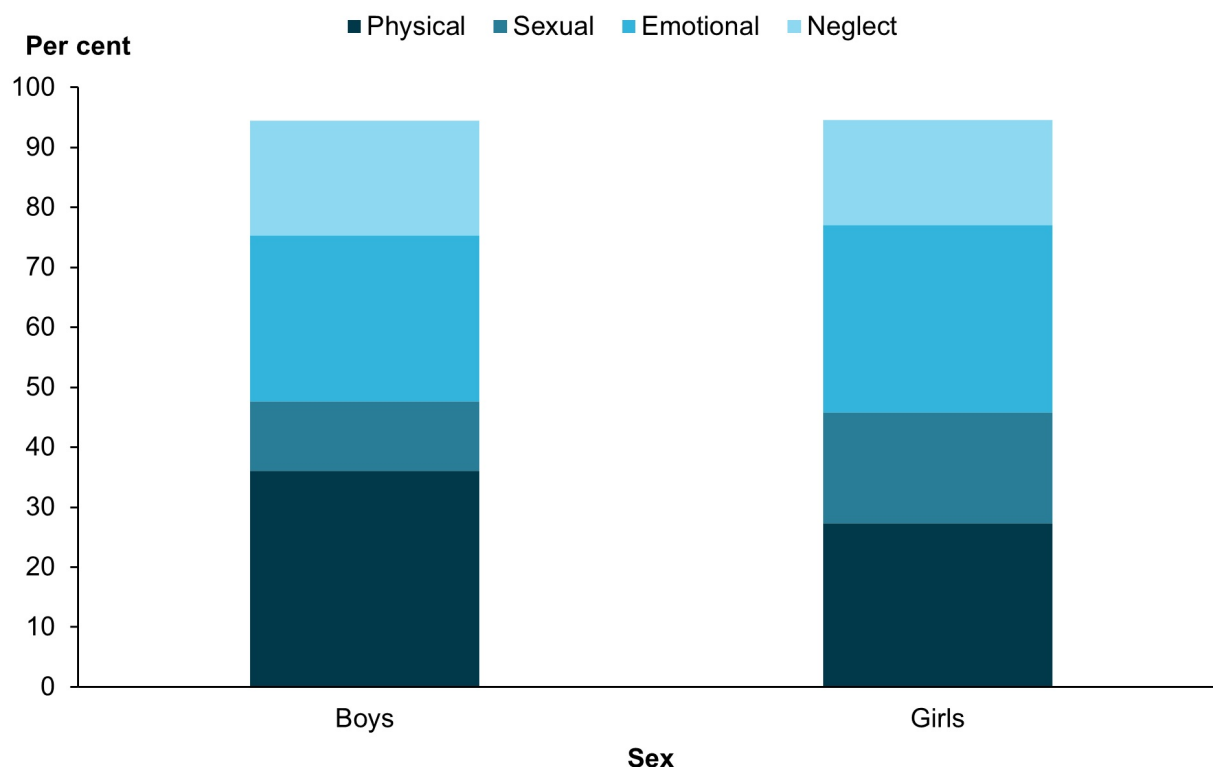
For girls (640), the most common forms of abuse were:

- emotional abuse (31% or 200)
- physical abuse (27% or 175).

Sexual abuse was more common among girls (19% or 120) than boys (12% or 65), while neglect was similar among boys (19% or 110) and girls (18% or 115) (Figure 2).

Source: Supplementary data table S9.6.

Figure 2: Children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care, by type of abuse and sex, 2021-22



Note: Total includes children whose sex was not stated or recorded as 'intersex or indeterminate', and children whose abuse type was not stated. As such, the subcategories may not sum to 100%.

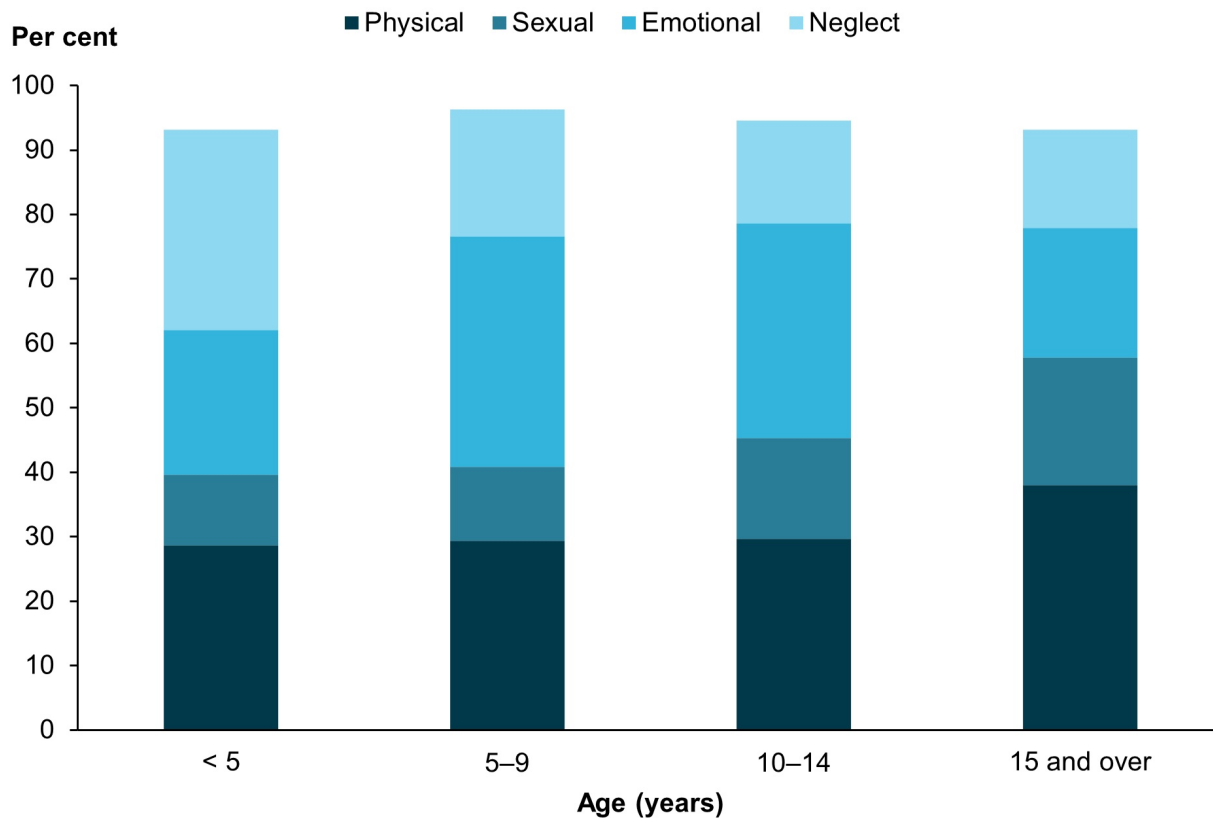
Source: Supplementary data table S9.6.

The most common type of abuse varied across age groups.

- Emotional abuse was most common among those aged 5-9 (36% or 110) and 10-14 (33% or 165) at the time of substantiation.
- Neglect was most common among children aged under 5 (31% or 40).
- Physical abuse (38% or 120) and sexual abuse (20% or 62) were most common among those aged 15 and over (Figure 3).

Source: Supplementary data table S9.5.

Figure 3: Children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care, by type of abuse and age, 2021-22



Notes:

1. Total includes children whose abuse type was not stated. As such, the subcategories may not sum to 100%.
2. Age is based on the child's age on the date the substantiation was recorded, not age at the time the abuse occurred. As such, the '15 and over' category may include children who were under 18 at the time of abuse, but were aged 18 and over at the time of substantiation.

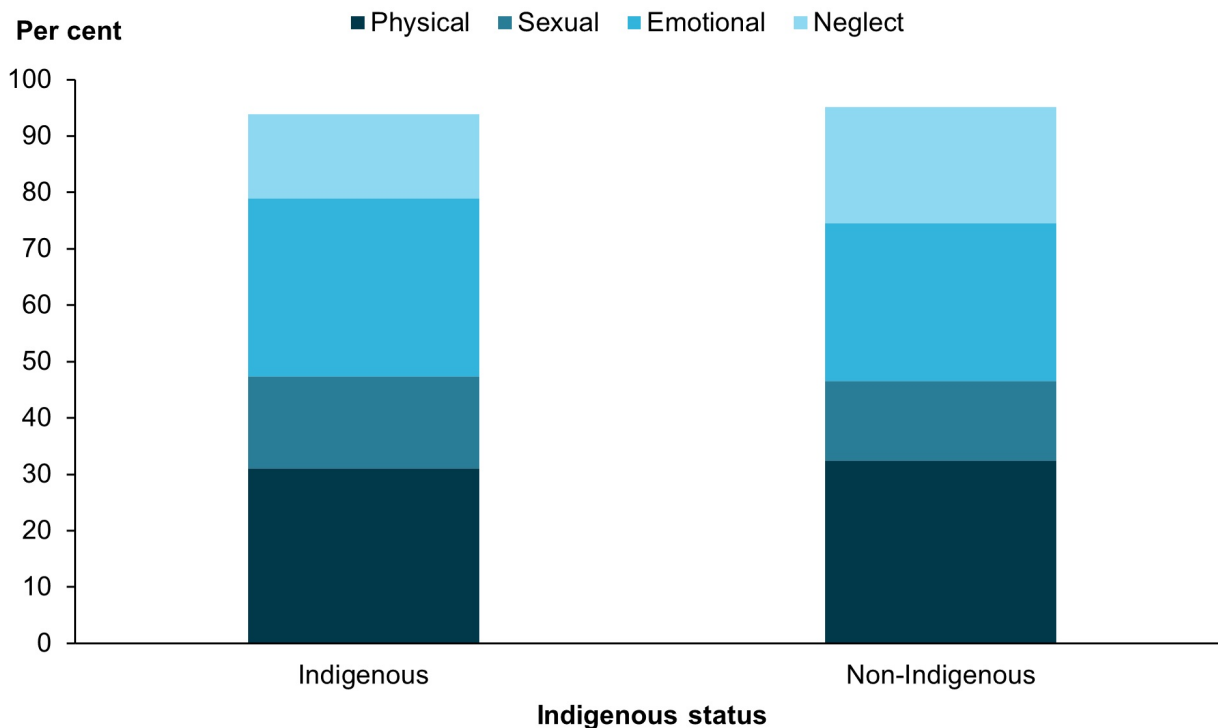
Source: Supplementary data table S9.5.

The incidence of primary types of abuse was similar for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (570) and non-Indigenous children (660).

- Emotional abuse (32% or 180) and physical abuse (31% or 175) were the most common types of abuse among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Physical abuse was the most common type of abuse (32% or 215) for non-Indigenous children, followed by emotional abuse (28% or 185).
- Sexual abuse was similar among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (16% or 93) and non-Indigenous children (14% or 93).
- Neglect was slightly more common among non-Indigenous children (21% or 135) than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (15% or 85) (Figure 4).

Source: Supplementary data table S9.4.

Figure 4: Children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse in care, by type of abuse and Indigenous status, 2021-22



Note: Total includes children whose Indigenous status was not stated, and children whose abuse type was not stated. As such, the subcategories may not sum to 100%.

Source: Supplementary data table S9.4.

Rate of abuse among all children in care

Currently, it is not possible to estimate the rate of abuse among all children in care because:

- data are based on the date of substantiation (not date of abuse) so may include historical cases of children who were in care at the time the abuse occurred, but subsequently exited care before the date of the substantiation. This may mean it is not possible to identify a directly comparable numerator and denominator for use in rate calculations. It may only be feasible to identify a 'best estimate' of all children in the in-care population to use as a denominator
- abuse in care substantiations data include children in out-of-home care, and children on selected types of court orders who may be in other (non-out-of-home care) living arrangements. Currently, there are no readily available data on other living arrangements. Data are readily available for the [out-of-home care population](#), however, this is a narrower scope than the abuse in care substantiations data (so any comparisons may overestimate the rate of abuse in care).

Safety of children in care

This report presents data from the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set: a national data collection on safety in care. The departments responsible for child protection in each state and territory supply data to the AIHW for analysis and national reporting.

This collection was established in response to 3 [recommendations](#) from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Although the Royal Commission had a specific focus on sexual abuse, the national data collection also includes physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Work is continuing to enhance and expand the collection and reporting of these data.

State and territory governments, in response to the findings from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, have agreed to implement a range of data reforms. These include:

- developing nationally agreed key terms and definitions in relation to child sexual abuse
- prioritising enhancements to the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set
- adopting a national consistent definition for child sexual exploitation.

A number of other Royal Commission recommendations proposed changes to various aspects of the out-of-home care system to better protect vulnerable children from sexual abuse while in care. The efforts of the Australian, state and territory governments to implement the Royal Commission recommendations are described in [annual progress reports](#).

To provide a more complete understanding of the complexities of abuse in care, future national reporting will include:

- information about children who were the subject of multiple substantiations and/or had multiple types of abuse in care
 - a 'best estimate' of the rate of abuse among all children in care
 - expanded data to progress the Royal Commission recommendations (for example, additional child demographics, further information on when and where the abuse occurred and who perpetrated the abuse, along with data on sexual exploitation).
-



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Key findings

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with relatives or kin continues to increase from 50% in 2017 to 54% in 2022.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had at least one known sibling in out-of-home care, 70% were placed with at least one of their siblings in 2021-22.

Since 2016-17, around 4 out of 5 children who were reunified with their family did not return to out-of-home care in the subsequent 12 months.

Since 2016-17, younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care continues to be more likely to be reunified than older children.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe from harm and are able to thrive by remaining connected to their family, community and culture is a key focus of governments and community leaders. In 2021-22, about 58,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children came into contact with child protection systems.

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Insights*, data table S2.3.

In December 2021, *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported) was released, with the Action Plans launched in January 2023 (DSS 2022). Safe and Supported was developed, and continues to be driven, by shared decision-making between the Commonwealth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, state and territory governments and collaboratively with the non-government sector. Safe and Supported's vision is for children in Australia to reach their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect. Safe and Supported contributes directly to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap target 12 which aims to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.

Through the advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Aboriginal community-controlled Organisations, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) was committed to by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments in the previous National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (AIFS 2022; DSS 2021; SNAICC 2017), and continues to be of critical importance in Safe and Supported. The Placement Principle is centred on the 5 elements of *Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation and Connection*. State and territory governments responsible for child protection services are continuing to work towards implementing all five elements of the ATSICPP in legislation, policy, practice, programs and accountability frameworks.

References

AIFS (Australian Institute of Family Studies) (2022) *Australian child protection legislation*, AIFS, accessed 20 October 2023.

DSS (Department of Social Services) (2021) *The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 2031*, DSS, accessed 4 October 2023.

DSS (2022) *Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*, DSS, accessed 4 October 2023.

SNAICC National Voice for our Children (2017) *Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: a resource for legislation, policy, and program development*, SNAICC, accessed 4 October 2023.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Notifications are the entry point for children into the system. The notification triggers an intake process where child protection workers evaluate the notification and determine what action to take. An investigation occurs when a notification of alleged abuse meets the threshold for further action. At the conclusion of the investigation, the case manager will make a substantiation decision. An assessment of substantiation is made when a threshold of harm or potential harm is met.

Due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report on notifications, investigations and substantiations, data are not comparable between jurisdictions. Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on differences in jurisdictions' policy and practice.

Refer to *The process of determining child maltreatment section of Child protection Australia (CPA) 2021-22: Insights* for more information on notifications, investigations and substantiations.

How many notification assessment decisions were made?

In 2021-22, child protection departments made an assessment decision for 129,000 notifications of alleged child maltreatment about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Once a notification is received, the department will begin a process to determine the level of assistance they should provide in relation to the child who was the subject of a notification. In keeping with the prevention element of the ATSI CPP, departments protect the rights of children to be brought up in their families, ensuring that families have equitable access to quality service supports. This includes having alternative intake and referral pathways to early intervention prior to families being investigated by the child protection system.

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.1.

The prevention element of the ATSI CPP relates to supporting families and building the capacity in communities to care safely for their children. This will protect future generations from the devastating effects of removal from family, community, culture and country (SNAICC 2017).

54% (69,200) of notifications with an assessment decision were resolved without an investigation. Of the notifications with an assessment decision (note this excludes New South Wales and Tasmania, where notifications cannot be differentiated by some or all of these assessment decisions):

- about 19% (24,400) required other involvement, for example, in cases where the family needs are still being assessed and a case plan is developed
- 5.7% (7,400) were referred to other services or families were provided with advice
- 4.3% (5,600) did not require further action as the subject child was assessed as not being at risk of potential or actual harm.

Around 46% (59,500) of notifications were assessed as requiring an investigation (Figure 1).

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.1.

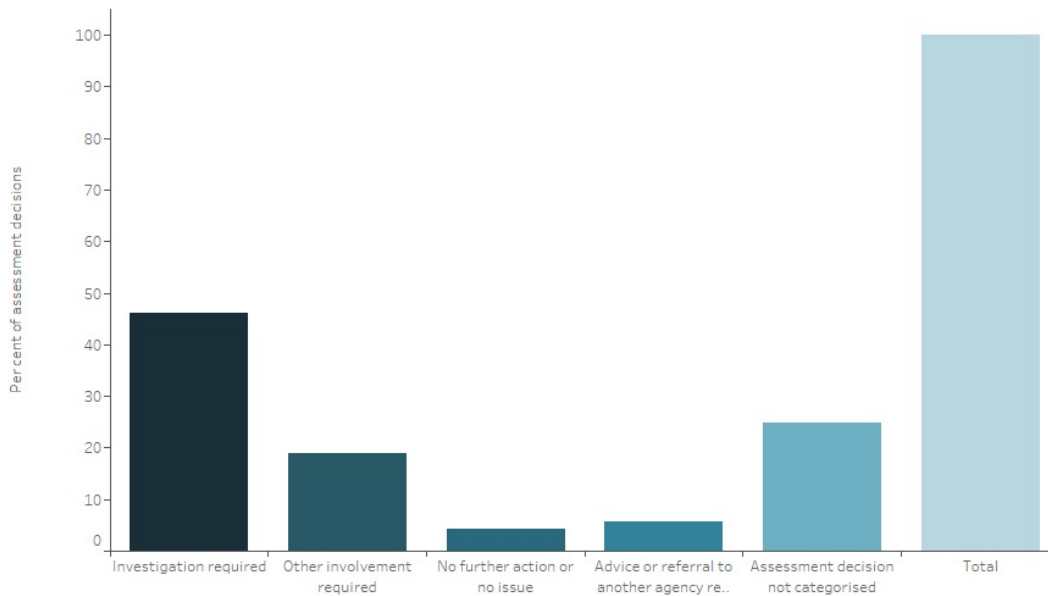
Figure 1: Number of notifications for which an assessment decision has been made, by notification assessment decision

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of notifications made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for which an assessment decision has been made, by notification assessment decision. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Data type
 ○ Number
 ● Per cent

NSW Vic Qld WA SA Tas ACT NT Australia

Notifications made about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia for which an assessment decision has been made, by notification assessment decision



Notes:

1. The population in this visualisation is different from supplementary table S3.1 in Child protection Australia 2021-22: Insights.
2. Data in this visualisation are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collected and report on notifications.
3. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding or the inclusion of not stated/unknowns in the total.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.1

What types of abuse or neglect were substantiated?

In 2021-22, around 11,800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were the subject of an assessment of substantiated maltreatment.

Sources: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.2.

For substantiated maltreatment assessments, the ‘primary’ type of abuse or neglect is considered the most severe or most likely to place the child at risk in the short term. If more than one type of abuse or neglect has occurred, those not classified as the ‘primary’ type are classified as ‘other’ type. A child can have multiple or no other types of abuse or neglect.

In 2021-22, emotional abuse was the most common type of primary abuse (50% or 5,900) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were the subject of substantiation assessment. Of the children who primarily experienced emotional abuse, the other types were:

- 24% (1,400) neglect
- 21% (1,200) physical abuse
- 1.9% (110) sexual abuse.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.2.

Emotional abuse was also the most common other type of abuse for all other primary types of abuse or neglect.

- For children with physical abuse substantiations, 53% (820) also had emotional abuse as other type of abuse.
- For children with neglect substantiations, 36% (1,300) also had emotional abuse as other type of abuse.
- For children with sexual abuse substantiations, 17% (140) also had emotional abuse as other type of abuse.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.2.

Sexual abuse was both the least common primary type of abuse or neglect (7.1% or 840), and the least common other type of abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

- For children with physical abuse substantiations, 3.0% (46) had sexual abuse as other type of abuse.
- For children with emotional abuse substantiations, 1.9% (110) had sexual abuse as other type of abuse.
- For children with neglect substantiations, 1.7% (60) had sexual abuse as other type of abuse (Figure 2).

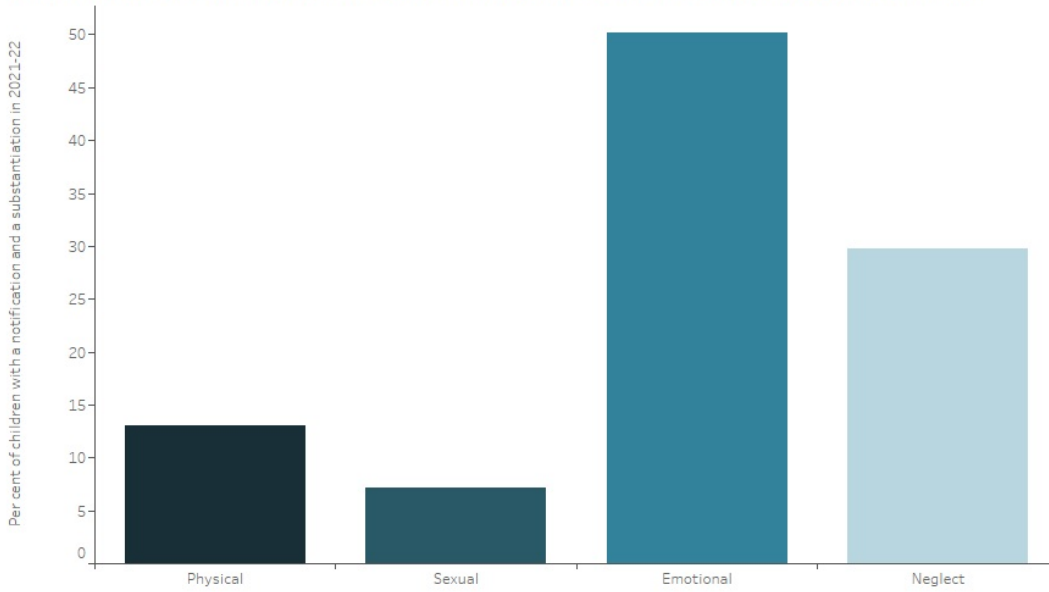
Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.2.

Figure 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a notification and substantiation in 2021-22, by primary and other types of abuse or neglect

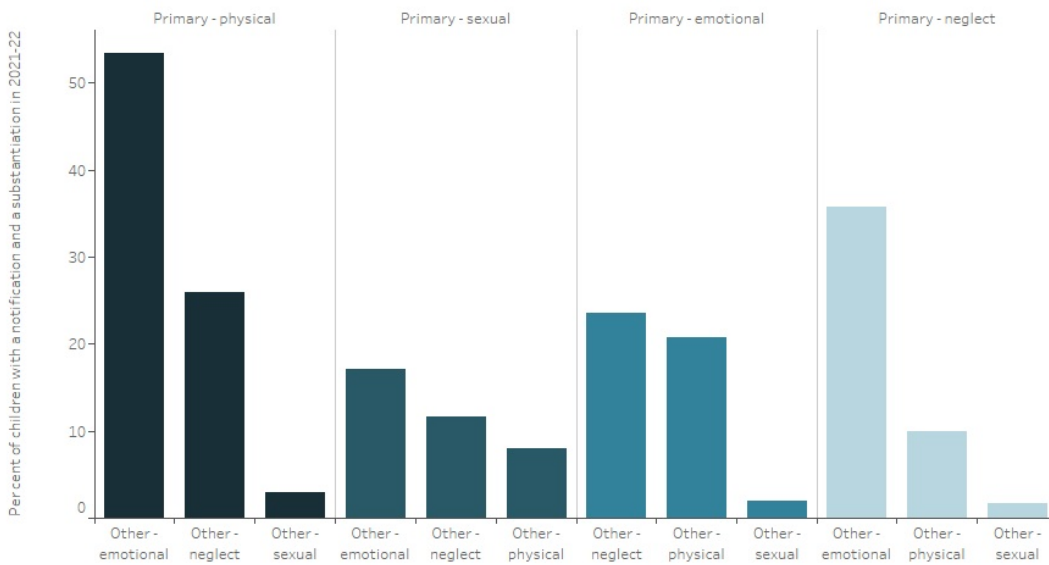
This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a substantiated maltreatment assessment in 2021-22, by primary and other types of abuse or neglect. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Number
Per cent

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a substantiated maltreatment assessment in 2021-22, by primary type of abuse or neglect



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a substantiated maltreatment assessment in 2021-22, by primary and other types of abuse or neglect



Notes:

1. Other types of abuse or neglect: as a per cent of children with this primary type of abuse (or neglect). Since children can have multiple other types of abuse or no other types of abuse, the summation of this will not equal to the number of children with this primary type of abuse.
2. Primary type of abuse or neglect: as a per cent of the total (i.e. children with a notification and substantiation in the reporting period).
3. Since children can have more than one notification and substantiation in the reporting period, this table takes the last substantiation within the reporting period, identified using latest notification in the reporting year.
4. The population in this table is different from supplementary data table S3.5 (and other similar data tables with alternative disaggregation) in Child protection Australia 2021-22: Insights.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.2



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Care and protection orders are legal orders regarding the care and protection of a child or young person. These orders can include various provisions depending on the jurisdiction. One of the powers under care and protection orders are to confer the day-to-day responsibility of the child to parents, child protection departments and other nominated carers.

Children may be placed on a child protection order following a substantiation assessment. However, not all substantiations lead to a care and protection order, for example, if the parents are assessed to be willing and able to protect the child from further maltreatment, non-statutory support may be provided.

In 2020-21 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were the subject of a substantiation, around one-quarter (3,900) were placed on a care and protection order within 12 months following a substantiation.

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Insights*, data table S4.2.

Refer to the [*Care and protection orders section of CPA 2021-22: Insights*](#) for more information.

How many children were on care and protection orders?

Across Australia, at 30 June 2022, around 24,600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were on a care and protection order. Children aged 10-14 years were the most common age group for care and protection orders (32% or 8,000 children) followed by children aged 5-9 years (29% or 7,100 children) (Figure 3).

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Insights*, data table S4.7.

Over the 2021-22 reporting period, around 3,900 children were discharged from care and protection orders. Of these:

- 21% (810 children) were continuously on an order between 2 and 4 years
- 24% (930 children) were continuously on an order for 8 years or more.

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Insights*, data table S4.4.

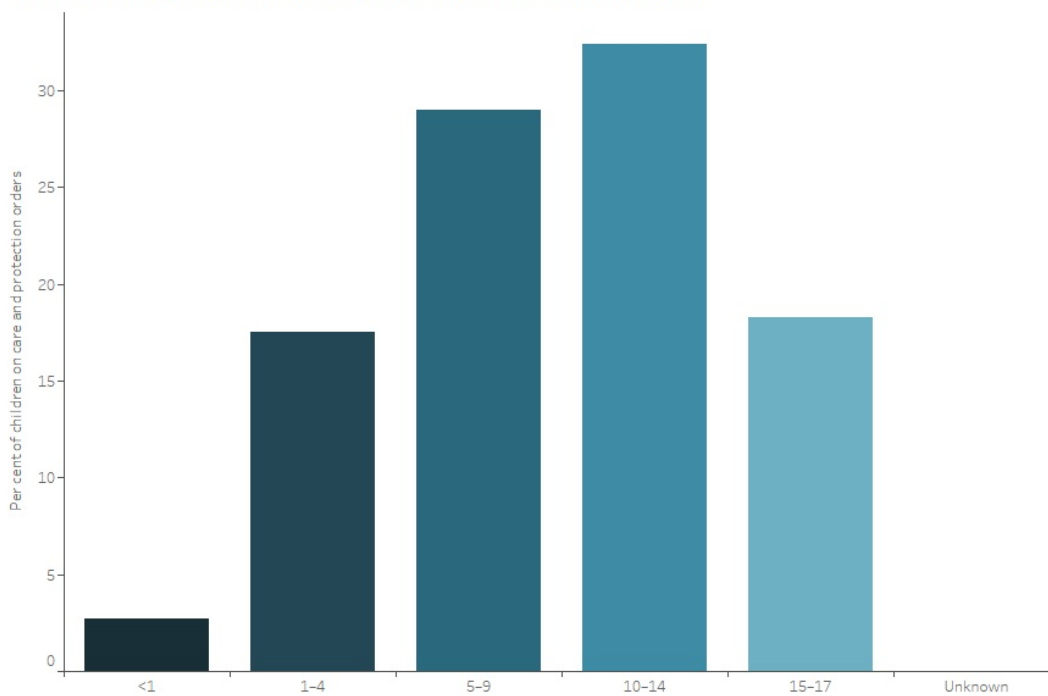
Figure 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders, by age group

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children who were on a care and protection order at 30 June 2022, by age group. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Data type
○ Number
● Per cent

NSW Vic Qld WA SA Tas ACT NT Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders in Australia, by age group



Note:

1. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data table S4.7

The most common care and protection order for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at 30 June 2022 were finalised guardianship orders (71% or 17,300 children). In finalised guardianship orders the day-to-day responsibility of the child is given to a nominated carer, though the legal responsibility for the child remains with the child protection department or non-government agency.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data table S4.10.

The second most common order type were third-party parental responsibility orders (15% or 3,800 children). In these orders both the day-to-day responsibility and legal responsibility is given to nominated carers approved by the courts (Figure 4).

Source: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data table S4.10.

Of the 3,800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on third-party parental responsibility orders at 30 June 2022:

- one-quarter (25% or 960) were living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin
- 46% (1,700) were living with non-Indigenous relatives or kin.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.3.

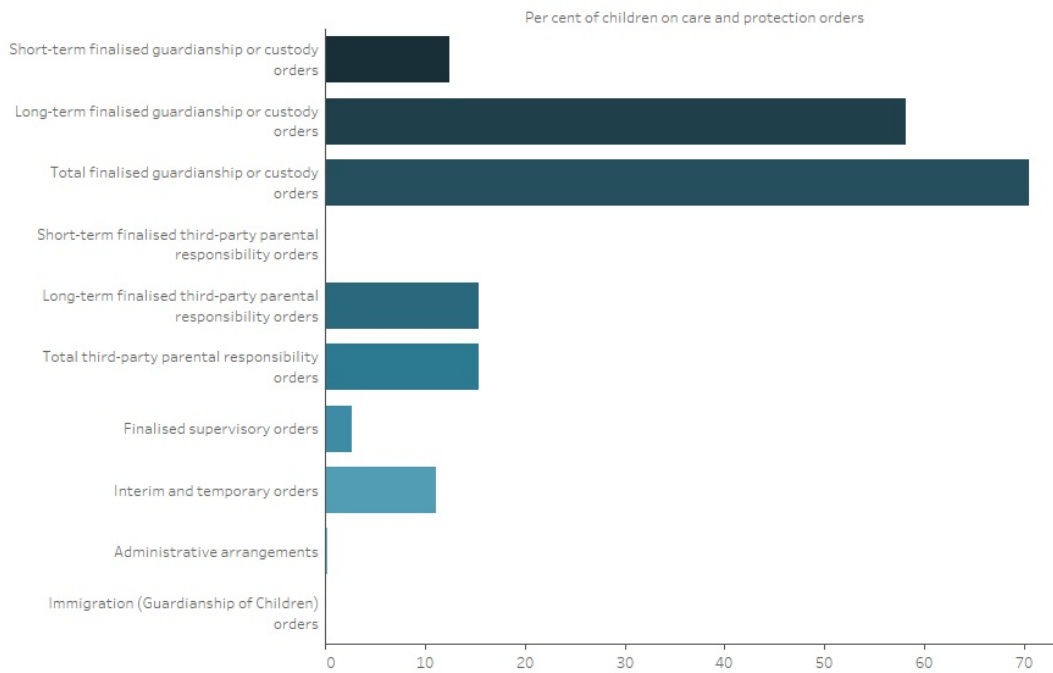
Figure 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, by type of care and protection order

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of children who were on a care and protection order at 30 June 2022, by type of care and protection order. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Data type
○ Number
● Per cent

NSW Vic Qld WA SA Tas ACT NT Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, by type of care and protection order



Note:

1. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding

Source: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data table S4.10

Has the number of children on care and protection orders changed over time?

Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders increased from 62 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to 72 per 1,000.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data table T2.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The ATSI CPP states the decision to place a child in out-of-home care can only be made after all active efforts to keep a child safely at home have been exhausted.

The nationally consistent definition of out-of-home care includes overnight care for children aged under 18 who are unable to live with their families due to child safety concerns, and where the carer receives a financial payment. It generally excludes children on third-party responsibility orders as the minister or executive no longer has guardianship of children on these orders.

Refer to the [Out-of-home care section of CPA 2021-22: Insights](#) for more information on out-of-home care and third-party parental responsibility orders.

How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care?

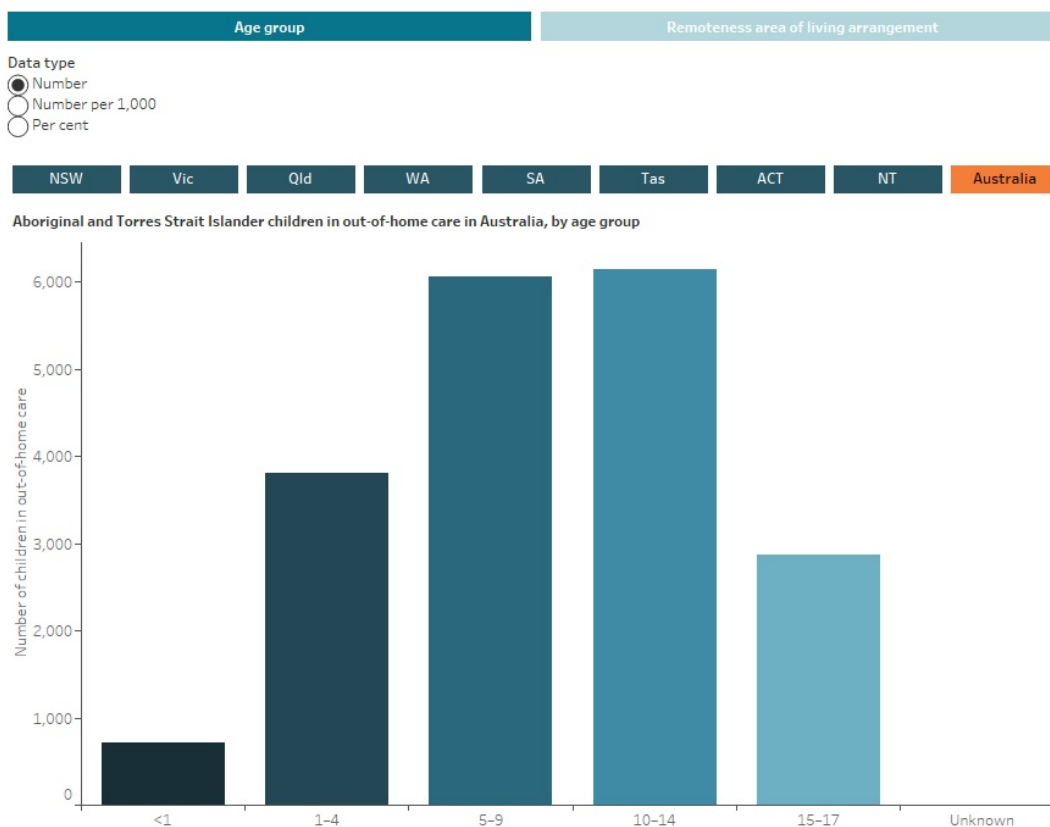
At 30 June 2022, around 19,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care. Of these:

- children aged 10-14 years made up around a third (6,100 children) of the children in out-of-home care
- 44% (8,500) were living in major cities (Figure 5).

Sources: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data tables S5.5 and S5.9.

Figure 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, by age group and remoteness area

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2022, by age group and remoteness area. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.



Note:
1. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding

Source: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data table S5.5

In 2021-22, 71% (13,900) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care had been continuously in care for 2 years or more, known as long-term care. Of these children:

- 71% (9,800) were aged 5-14 years
- 41% (5,700) were on a long-term guardianship order in a relative/kinship care arrangement, followed by 34% (4,700) who were on a long-term guardianship order in a foster care arrangement.

Sources: CPA 2021-22: Insights, data tables S5.15 and S5.16.

In 2021-22, around 4,100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were admitted to out-of-home care. The admission rate was highest for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under one at 41 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, compared with 12 per 1,000 or less for other age groups.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Insights*, data table S5.1.

Children in care can experience further abuse or neglect, for example, by their carer or another person in the household or care facility. In 2021-22, around 570 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were the subject of a substantiation assessment of abuse in care.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Safety of children in care*, data table S9.2.

Refer to the [CPA 2021-22: Safety of children in care section](#) for more information.

Placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are placed in out-of-home care, the ATSICPP identifies a placement hierarchy that seeks to maintain as high a level of connection as possible to family and culture (SNAICC 2017). Children should be placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives and family members.

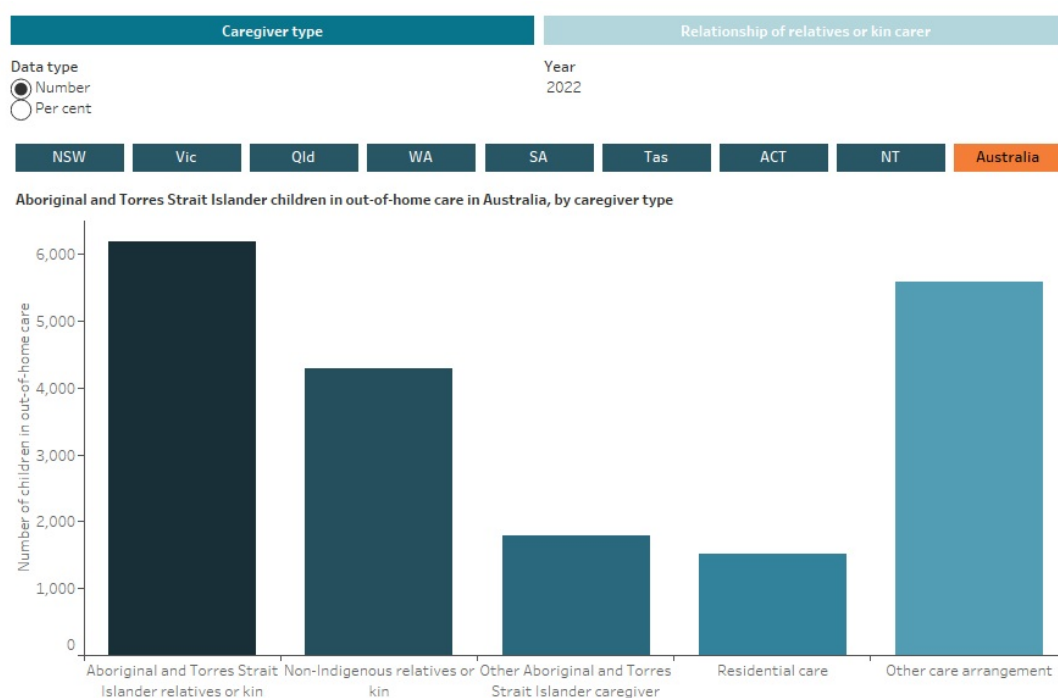
- Of the 19,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, around 10,500 (54%) were placed with their relatives or kin. Of these, children were most frequently placed with a grandparent, aunt, uncle or sibling as their carer (53% or 5,600).
- Around 1,800 (9.2%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with a non-relative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregiver.
- Around 7,200 (37%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were not placed with either relative or kin, or non-relative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers (Figure 6).

More information on the specific placement hierarchy can be found in [Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#).

Sources: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data tables 10.4 and 10.7.

Figure 6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, by caregiver type

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017 to 2022, by caregiver type, and where children are placed with relatives/kin, relationship of relative or kin carer. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.



Notes:

1. Data in this visualisation may not match previously published data due to resupplies and the application of consistent counting rules over time where possible.
2. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding or the inclusion of not stated/unknowns in the total.
3. Other care arrangement: includes children living with non-Indigenous caregivers that are not relatives/kin, in family groups homes, living independently or with any other type of caregiver.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.4

According to the ATSI CPP, it is important that children be placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives as soon as possible when placed in out-of-home care (SNAICC 2017). In 2021-22, 1,100 (26% of 4,100 children) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin in their first out-of-home care placement.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.6.

Reconnection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives and kin through placement change

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were unable to initially be placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin, the Placement Principle states that efforts should be made to **reconnect** the children with their family, community, culture and country through a placement change. In 2021-22, around 5,100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had more than one placement in an out-of-home care episode. Of these:

- around 730 (16%) children were reconnected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through their last placement change in 2021-22 (for example, a child is placed with a non-Indigenous carer and has a placement change to reside with their Aboriginal grandmother)
- 1,300 (26%) children were reconnected or stay connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through their last placement change in 2021-22 (for example, a child is placed with their Torres Strait Islander aunt and has a placement change to reside with their Torres Strait Islander grandfather).

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.9.

Around 540 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-16 years were reconnected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through a placement change in 2020-21 and remained in out-of-home care for at least 12 months. Of these:

- 450 (83%) remained with the same Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin for at least 12 months
- 470 (87%) remained with any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin for at least 12 months.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.10.

Of the 2,100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-16 years whose first placement was not with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin and who remained in out-of-home care for at least 12 months, 315 (15%) were reconnected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin within 12 months.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.11.

Placement with siblings in out-of-home care

As well as having carers who are relatives or kin, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be placed with their siblings where possible to keep strong relationships and support connection to family (SNAICC, 2019). Factors such as safety and carer availability may impact the ability for child protection agencies to place children with their siblings. In 2021-22, of the 12,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who have at least one known sibling in out-of-home care, 8,900 (70%) were placed with at least one of their siblings.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.8.

Maintaining and supporting connections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care

The connection element of the ATSI CPP relates to support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care to maintain or re-establish connections to their family, community, culture and country (SNAICC 2017). Cultural plans include details such as a child's cultural background and actions taken to maintain their connection to culture. It should be noted that the data do not provide information on the quality of the plan, or whether it was implemented.

At 30 June 2022, of the 17,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care who were required to have a cultural support plan, 78% (13,800) had a current cultural support plan. Since 2017 there has been an increase of around 5,300 children with a current cultural support plan.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.5.

Has the number of children in out-of-home care changed over time?

Between 30 June 2018 and 30 June 2022, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care increased from around 17,200 to around 19,400 children.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Insights*, data table T2.

From 2017-18 to 2021-22, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children admitted to out-of-home care each year fluctuated from around 3,800 to around 4,000 children.

Source: CPA 2021-22: *Insights*, data table S5.17.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

There are multiple paths a child in out-of-home care (as per the [nationally consistent definition of out-of-home care](#)) can move through when transitioning from out-of-home care. These pathways from out-of-home care include children who are being:

- reunified with their families
- placed in a third-party care arrangement
- adopted from care
- aged-out of care once they turn 18 years old
- transitioned to other placements that are out-of-scope for out-of-home care (for example, a non-funded placement where they live independently).

Refer to the [Glossary](#) for more information on the different pathways from out-of-home care.

States and territories have committed to the safe reunification of children with families as part of the broader commitment to the implementation of the ATSI CPP (DSS 2022; AIHW 2022).

Reunification is covered by the connection element of the ATSI CPP (AIHW 2022). Reunifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care with their families can mean potentially re-establishing the closest possible connection to their family, community and culture (SNAICC 2017). Children are considered to be eligible for reunification if they are in out-of-home care.

Considerations for pathways from out-of-home care

The different jurisdictional policies and practice can affect the comparability of pathways data, including:

- There is no nationally agreed definition for reunifications. As such, reporting of permanency events relating to reunification is based on local definitions of reunification.
- Third-party parental responsibility orders vary across jurisdictions with the biggest difference relating to the provision of ongoing case management in some cases.

Refer to the [Appendices](#) for more information on differences in jurisdictions' policy and practice.

How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were discharged from out-of-home care?

In 2021-22, about 4,200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were discharged from out-of-home care. Of these children:

- 29% (1,200) were in out-of-home care for less than 6 months
- 28% (1,100) were in out-of-home care for 5 years or more.

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.12.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children discharged from out-of-home care increased with age, ranging from around 195 for those aged under one to about 1,500 for those aged 15-17 years.

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Insights*, data table S5.2.

Types of pathways from out-of-home care

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children discharged from out-of-home care in 2021-22:

- 40% (1,700) were reunified
- 8.7% (365) were placed on third-party orders
- 5 children were adopted
- 18% (730) aged-out
- 33% (1,400) included but are not limited to those that were transitioned to out-of-scope placements (Figure 7).

Source: *CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, data table 10.13.

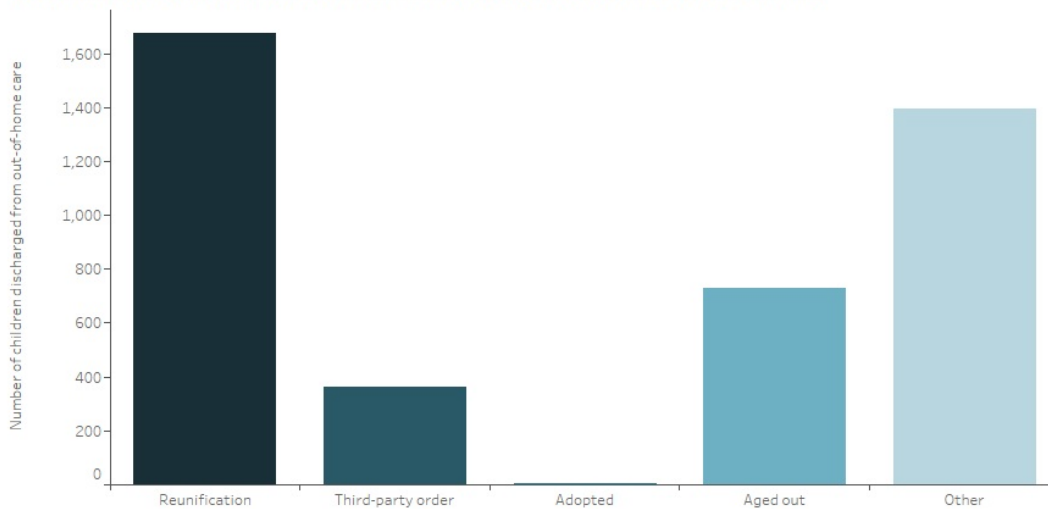
Figure 7: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were discharged from out-of-home care, by exit pathway

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were discharged from out-of-home care in the reporting period, by exit pathway. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Data type
● Number
○ Per cent

NSW Vic Qld WA SA Tas ACT NT Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia who were discharged from out-of-home care, by exit pathway



Notes:

1. Children discharged on their 18th birthday are included in this table.
2. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding or the inclusion of not stated/unknowns in the total.
3. Aged out: denotes children who do not fall into the reunification, third-party order, and adopted categories, and their 18th birthday is within a week of the out-of-home care discharge date.
4. Other: denotes children who do not fall into the reunification, third-party order, adopted and aged-out categories. This would include children who are discharged from out-of-home care and exit to a placement that is not in scope for out-of-home care (e.g. a non-funded placement where they live independently, with parents on a trial reunification, in detention etc).

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.13

The ATSCIPP states that reunification of children must be considered early, and plans and culturally safe supports must be put in place to support reunification where it is identified as possible (SNAICC 2017). Of the 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were reunified in 2021-22:

- 92% (1,600) were reunified with birth parents
- 39% (650) were reunified within 6 months, followed by 20% (335) of children who were reunified between 2 to less than 5 years
- 29% (490) were aged one to four, compared with 6.7% (115) who were aged 16-17 years (Figure 8).

Sources: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data tables 10.14, 10.17 and 10.18.

Figure 8: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who exited out-of-home care to reunification

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were reunified in 2017-18 to 2021-22, by age group and time from admission. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

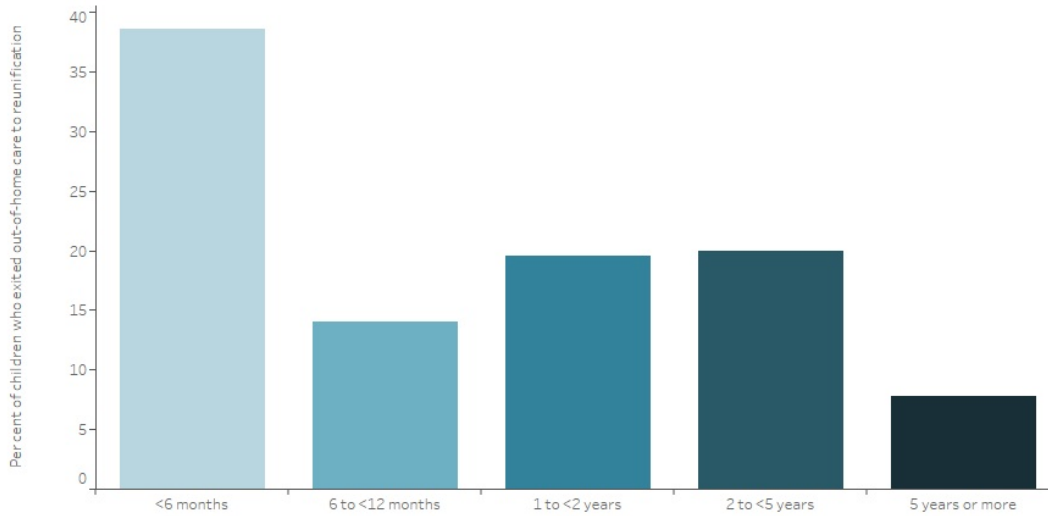
Age group | Time from admission

Data type
 Number
 Per cent

Year
 2021-22

NSW | Vic | Qld | WA | SA | Tas | ACT | NT | Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were reunified in Australia, by time from admission



Notes:

1. These data relate to ATSI CPP indicator 2.10.
2. Does not include data from the 2016-17 CP NMDS collection, since the variable used to determine reunification differs from later collections.
3. Data in this visualisation may not match previously published data due to resupplies and the application of consistent counting rules over time where possible.
4. Due to variability in data availability across jurisdictions, care should be exercised in comparing national data between years.
5. Percentages in this visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding or the inclusion of not stated/unknowns in the total.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.17

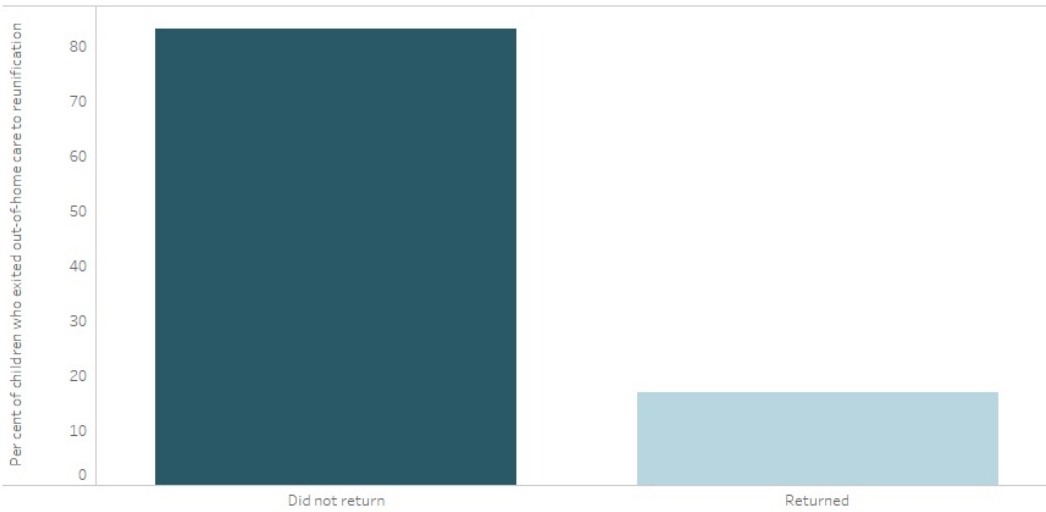
Around 1,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-16 years were reunified in 2020-21. Of these, 83% (1,400) did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification (Figure 9).

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.19.

Figure 9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who exited out-of-home care to reunification, by whether they returned to out-of-home care within 12 months

This interactive data visualisation shows the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who exited out-of-home care to reunification in 2016-17 to 2020-21, by whether they returned to out-of-home care within 12 months. Data are displayed for each state and territory and Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who exited out-of-home care to reunification in Australia, by whether they returned to out-of-home care within 12 months



Notes:

1. Did not return: these data relate to ATSI/CPP indicator 2.4.
2. Only children less than 17 are included in this indicator. This is because 12 months following the reunification for a child aged 17, the child would be 18 years of age and no longer in scope for out-of-home care.
3. Includes data for 2016-17 since this uses the 2017-18 Child Protection National Minimum Data Set collection to determine children reunified in 2016-17, by whether or not they returned to out-of-home care within 12 months.
4. Data in this visualisation may not match previously published data due to resupplies and the application of consistent counting rules over time where possible.
5. Due to variability in data availability across jurisdictions, care should be exercised in comparing national data between years.
6. Percentages in the visualisation may not add to 100 due to rounding or the inclusion of not stated/unknowns in the total.

Source: CPA 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, data table 10.19

References

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

DSS (2022) *Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*, DSS, accessed 4 October 2023.

SNAICC - National Voice for our Children (2017) *Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: a resource for legislation, policy, and program development*, SNAICC, accessed 1 June 2023.

SNAICC - National Voice for our Children (2019), *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A guide to support implementation*, SNAICC, accessed 1 June 2023.



Indicators

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child
Placement Principle



Indicators

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) indicators

Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) by states and territories is designed to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection and out-of-home care systems. It also aims to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children connected to their family, community, culture and country (SNAICC 2017). At the core of the ATSICPP are the 5 elements of Prevention, Partnership, Placement, Participation and Connection (SNAICC 2017).

The ATSICPP indicators measure progress towards the implementation of the ATSICPP in child protection and out-of-home care systems and are grouped under each of the 5 core ATSICPP elements (SNAICC, 2017). Detailed information on the ATSICPP can be found on the website of [SNAICC the National Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#).

This data visualisation presents data on the 11 indicators for which data are currently available. These 11 indicators relate to the Placement and Connection elements of the ATSICPP.

The remaining indicators are still undergoing development. These include indicators relating to the Prevention, Partnership and Participation elements, for which data are currently not available for reporting.

For further context on the data below, please refer to the Child Protection Australia 2021-22: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children content [technical specifications](#) and [data tables](#).

This dashboard shows data for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle indicators by jurisdiction that are reportable in several line graphs.

For indicator 1.1 in Australia at 30 June 2022, 63.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care were living with relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, this is the same as 2021.

For indicator 1.2 in Australia in 2021-22, 16.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were reconnected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through placement change. This is a 0.2 percentage point increase since 2020-21.

For indicator 1.3 in Australia in 2020-21, 54.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care who were reconnected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through placement change and remained with relatives or kin for 12 months or more. This is a 3.2 percentage point increase since 2019-20.

For indicator 1.4 in Australia in 2021-22, 26.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin for their first placement. This is a 0.2 percentage point increase since 2021-21.

For indicator 2.1 in Australia, at 30 June 2022, 21.0% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin, or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, this is a 0.1 percentage point decrease since 2021.

For indicator 2.2 in Australia, at 30 June 2022, 78.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care who have a current, documented and approved cultural support plan. This is a 4.8 percentage point increase since 2021.

For indicator 2.3 in Australia, 2021-22, 14.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (excluding children on long-term guardianship orders) were reunified. This is a 0.3 percentage point increase since 2020-21.

For indicator 2.4 in Australia, 2020-21, 83.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to reunification in the reporting period and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months. This is a 0.1 percentage point increase since 2019-20.

For indicator 2.8 in Australia, 2021-22, 92.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care who were reunified were reunified with their birth parents. This is a 2.9 percentage point increase since 2020-21.

For indicator 2.9 in Australia 2021-22, 0% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were reunified with relatives or kin (excludes birth parents). This is a 0.1 percentage point decrease from 2020-21.

For indicator 2.10, in Australia since 2017-18, children who were in out-of-home care for less time were more likely to be reunified.

[Click to see indicators under development](#)

NSW Vic Qld WA SA Tas ACT NT Australia

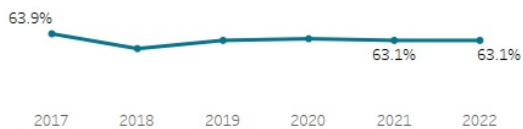
What is the Placement element?

Placing children in out-of-home care in accordance with the established Aboriginal and Torres





Indicator 1.1



In Australia at 30 June 2022, **63.1%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were living with relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, this is a **0.0** percentage point change, the same as 2021.

Indicator 1.2



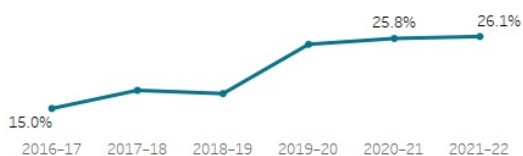
In Australia in 2021-22, **16.3%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were reconnected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through placement change. This is a **0.2** percentage point increase since 2020-21.

Indicator 1.3



In Australia in 2020-21, **86.6%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care who were reconnected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin through placement change and remained with relatives or kin for 12 months or more. This is a **1.1** percentage point decrease since 2019-20.

Indicator 1.4



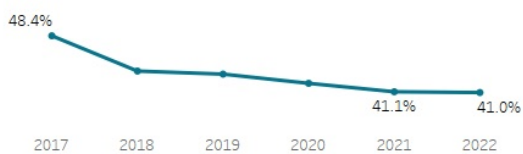
In Australia in 2021-22, **26.1%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin for their first placement. This is a **0.2** percentage point increase since 2020-21.

What is the Connection element?

Maintaining and supporting connections to family, community, culture and country for children in out-of-home care.

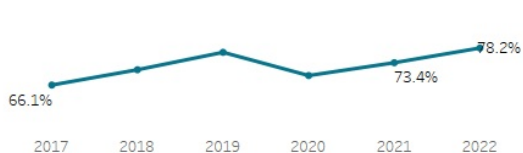


Indicator 2.1



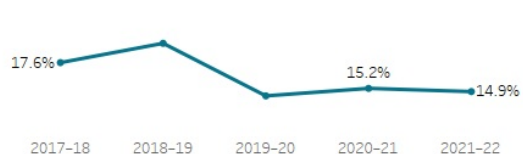
In Australia at 30 June 2022, **41.0%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were living with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin, or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, this is a **0.1** percentage point decrease since 2021.

Indicator 2.2



In Australia at 30 June 2022, **78.2%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care have a current, documented and approved cultural support plan. This is a **4.8** percentage point increase since 2021.

Indicator 2.3



In Australia in 2021-22, **14.9%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (excluding children on long-term guardianship orders) were reunified. This is a **0.3** percentage point decrease since 2020-21.

Indicator 2.4



In Australia in 2020-21, **83.1%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-16 who exited out-of-home care to reunification in the reporting period and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months. This is a **0.1** percentage point decrease since 2019-20.

2016-17 2017-18 2018-19 2019-20 2020-21

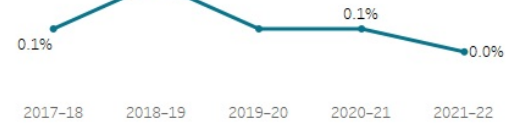
Indicator 2.8

In Australia in 2021-22, **92.3%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care who were reunified, were reunified with their birth parents. This is a **2.9** percentage point increase since 2020-21.



Indicator 2.9

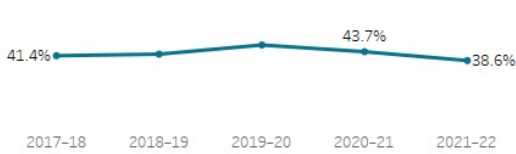
In Australia in 2021-22, **0%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were reunified with relatives or kin (excludes birth parents). This is a **0.1** percentage point decrease from 2020-21.



Indicator 2.10

Time from admission <6 months

In Australia in 2021-22, **38.6%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were in out-of-home care for less than 6 months were reunified.



References

SNAICC - National Voice for our Children (2017) *Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: a resource for legislation, policy, and program development*, SNAICC, accessed 4 October 2023.



Technical notes

Rounding of data

Data in this report have been rounded for readability. The following rounding rules have been applied:

- Numbers over 100,000 and under a million are rounded to the nearest multiple of 1,000.
- Numbers between 1,000 and 100,000 are rounded to the nearest multiple of 100.
- Numbers between 500 and 999 are rounded to the nearest multiple of 10.
- Numbers between 100 and 499 are rounded to the nearest multiple of 5.
- Numbers between 10 and 99 are rounded to the nearest whole number.
- Numbers under 10 are rounded to one decimal place.

Care and protection orders

The following rules apply to the counting of admissions, discharges and length of time for care and protection orders:

1. A renewal of an existing order is not counted as an admission. A change to an order is counted as an admission. However, if a new care and protection order is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge of another order (regardless of that type of order), neither an admission nor a discharge are counted.
2. If a child is on multiple care and protection orders/ arrangements, all orders/ arrangements must be discharged before a discharge is counted.
3. If a child is admitted to, or discharged from, multiple care and protection orders/arrangements, the child is counted for only one admission and/or one discharge for the year.
4. The length of time continuously on an order is counted only for the first order/arrangement from which the child is discharged during the year.
5. If a child is discharged from an order and a new care and protection order/arrangement is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge, the orders are deemed to be consecutive (that is, the length of time on an order will include both orders).
6. Each child is counted for one admission for the year.

Population data

Population estimates for all children aged 0 to 17 years are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Population estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are sourced from Indigenous population projections produced by the ABS. Non-indigenous population estimates are derived by calculating the difference between the total population and the corresponding estimate from the Indigenous population projections.

The most up to date time series of population estimates from the ABS are used in all trend calculations. This will result in differences to data published in previous *Child protection Australia* reports.

Population estimates used to calculate rates are available in the [Supplementary data tables P1-P5](#).

Box 1.1: COVID-19 impact on population estimates

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting Australian Government closure of the international border from 20 March 2020, caused significant disruptions to the usual Australian population trends. This report uses Australian Estimated Residential Population (ERP) estimates that reflect these disruptions.

In the year July 2020 to June 2021, the overall population growth was much smaller than the years prior, and in particular, there was a relatively large decline in the population of Victoria. ABS reporting indicates these were primarily due to net-negative international migration ([National, state and territory population | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)).

This change in usual population trends may result in some rates and proportions being greater than in previous years due to decreases in the denominator (population size) of some sub-populations.

Calculation of rates

This report uses both December and June population data, depending on the point of analysis (see Points of analysis). December population data are used when calculating rates for during the year counts. June population data are used when calculating rates for 30 June counts.

Population rates are calculated by dividing the number of children for a specific measure or group (for example, children on care and protection orders) by the corresponding population. For example, the rates of children on care and protection orders at 30 June are calculated as follows:

Rate ratio

Rates can be compared using a rate ratio, which is one rate divided by another. Rate ratios should be interpreted with care where there are small denominators or where a large proportion of data is recorded as 'unknown'.

In *Child protection Australia* reporting, rate ratios are mainly used to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates, and measure the level of Indigenous over-representation. Rates are also presented to guide interpretation.

Rate ratios are not calculated where one or both of the rates have fewer than 5 children or young people in the numerator.

Age

Age is always calculated in whole years. For example, a child who was aged 5 years and 9 months is recorded as being aged 5.

Throughout *Child protection Australia*, age is calculated at different points in time for a child, depending on the analysis in question:

- For 30 June analyses, age is calculated as at 30 June.
- For analyses of events occurring during the year, age is calculated at the relevant point in time during the year:
 - For analyses of children who were the subject of a child protection notification or substantiation, age is calculated at the earliest date of notification during the period.
 - For analyses of children who were admitted to, or discharged from, a care and protection order or an out-of-home care placement, age is calculated at the date of first admission and first discharge during the period.
- For analyses of children in contact with the child protection system, age is calculated at the earliest point of contact or at 1 July of the relevant reporting period if the child was on an ongoing care and protection order, or in an ongoing out-of-home care placement at the beginning of the period.

Average

Averages or means are calculated by summing all the values of interest, and dividing by the total number of observations of interest. In *Child protection Australia*, averages are used in the reporting of the average co-occurrence of abuse and neglect.

Identification of Indigenous status

Children

The practices used to identify and record the Indigenous status of children vary across states and territories. The quality of the data is therefore unknown.

In this collection, children are counted as Indigenous if they are identified as such in the state and territory data collections. Where possible, children whose Indigenous status is recorded as 'unknown' are excluded from the calculations of rates and proportions. So, the counts for Indigenous children are likely to be an underestimate of the number of Indigenous children in the child protection system.

Caregivers

In the out-of-home care data collection, the Indigenous status of caregivers is collected. Carers who are identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are included in the Indigenous category for caregivers. In instances where there is no single caregiver, such as facility-based care, the caregiver will be recorded as Indigenous if the facility is specifically for Indigenous children and/or has Indigenous management. However, in [Supplementary data table S5.12](#) children are not counted as living with Indigenous caregivers in Indigenous led facility-based care as this is not a preferred placement type under the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#). If Indigenous children are living in other types of facility-based care, the caregiver are not counted as Indigenous.

Points of analysis

During the year

Each child is counted only once, even if a child had multiple occurrences of the event during the year.

For example, when calculating the number of children who were the subjects of substantiations of child protection notifications during the year, a child will be counted if a notification received during the financial year was substantiated. However, the child will only be counted once, regardless of how many notifications were substantiated for them in the financial year. Where details relating to the substantiation are reported (for example, type of abuse or neglect, or age of the child) the first substantiated notification is counted.

30 June (at the end of the financial year)

Counts of people at 30 June are calculated by counting each distinct person for whom the event of interest was ongoing at the end of the financial year. Each person is counted only once, even if that person had multiple occurrences of the event ongoing at 30 June.

In instances where a child or young person has multiple child protection orders ongoing at 30 June, the child or young person is counted against the national order type that represented the highest level of intervention.

In instances where a child or young person has multiple living arrangements ongoing at 30 June, the child or young person is counted against the living arrangement type that is considered their usual placement.

For example, when calculating the number of children and young people on a care and protection order at 30 June, a child or young person will be counted if they were on a care and protection order during the reporting period, and the order had not ended, or ended after 30 June. If the child or young person had an ongoing finalised guardianship order and an ongoing interim order at 30 June, they would be counted in the finalised guardianship order category, as this represents the higher level of intervention of the 2 orders.

Trends

Trends are reported as 5-year periods unless specified otherwise. Increases over time in the number or rate of children in the child protection system or children receiving support may relate to legislative changes, such as the expansion of the list of occupations that is mandated to report cases of suspected child maltreatment, or increases in public awareness from inquiries into child protection processes.

It is standard practice to present 5-year trends in data, as changes in state and territory legislation, policy/practice, and information management systems reduce the ability to accurately compare data over longer periods.

Changes that have an impact on the data are provided as caveats to the data, in the Technical Notes, and in [Appendices B-E](#).

Socioeconomic area

Child protection Australia reporting uses the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), developed by the ABS to analyse socioeconomic status (ABS 2018b).

The SEIFA comprises 4 indexes that are created using information from the Census of Population and Housing. These indexes are:

- the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage
- the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage
- the Index of Economic Resources
- the Index of Education and Occupation.

The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage is used to compare the average level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. It is the SEIFA index used in this report, ranking geographical areas on a continuum from 'most disadvantaged' to 'least disadvantaged' using a combination of income, education, employment, occupation, housing, and other Census variables (ABS 2018b).

The AIHW uses postcode data to match SEIFA information to child protection data and to calculate population quintiles. The population datasets used to calculate the quintiles for SEIFA were based on regional population data the ABS published in 2017 (ABS 2017).

For more information on SEIFA refer to [Socio-economic indexes for areas: getting a handle on individual diversity within areas. ABS cat. no. 1351.0.55.036 \(ABS 2011\)](#).

Remoteness area

Child protection Australia reports use the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure developed by the ABS to analyse the remoteness of a child's usual place of residence at the time of notification, and the remoteness of a child's living arrangement (ABS 2018a).

The AIHW uses SA2 or postcodes to match remoteness information to child protection data. These data include SA2 / postcode at notification and SA2 / postcode of living arrangement. Some SA2's and postcodes do not map to single Remoteness Areas. For these SA2's and postcodes, the data are weighted according to how the population is distributed across the SA2 / postcode and how this overlaps with the relevant Remoteness Area/s. Some children and young people might appear in remoteness areas for which there is no population within that state or territory. This is due to records whose SA2 / postcode is in a different state or territory to the one in which they received a notification, or were in out-of-home care.

For more information on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure refer to [Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure. ABS cat. no. 1270.0.55.005](#).

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2011) [Socio-economic indexes for areas: getting a handle on individual diversity within areas. September 2011](#), ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2017) [Regional population by age and sex, Australia, 2016](#), ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2018a) [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\): volume 5 - Remoteness Structure](#), ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2018b) [Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), Australia, 2016](#), ABS, accessed 21 April 2023.



Glossary

Refer to the AIHW's [child protection glossary](#) for definitions of terminology used in this report.





Notes

Amendments

1 November 2023

- **Report**

In the 'Child protection system in Australia' chapter, text for the out-of-home care component of the child protection system has been updated to correct a typographical error.

In the 'Supporting children' chapter, the year reference for children who were subjects of substantiation and subsequently placed on a care and protection order within 12 months following substantiation has been updated to correct a typographical error.

- **Data tables**

Minor corrections were made to data in Table S5.5, and to titles and footnotes in Tables S3.1, S3.5, S3.10, S4.2, S5.2, S5.19 and S5.20 to accurately reflect data processing.

Data quality statement

[Child protection Australia 2021-22](#)





Data





Report editions

This release

Child protection Australia 2021-22 | 20 Feb 2024

Previous releases

- Child protection Australia 2020-21 | **Web report** | 15 Jun 2022
- Child protection Australia 2019-20 | **Publication** | 18 May 2021
- Child protection Australia 2018-19 | **Publication** | 18 Mar 2020
- Child protection Australia 2017-18 | **Publication** | 08 Mar 2019
- Child protection Australia 2016-17 | **Publication** | 09 Mar 2018
- Child protection Australia 2015-16 | **Publication** | 16 Mar 2017
- Child protection Australia 2014-15 | **Publication** | 21 Apr 2016
- Child protection Australia 2013-14 | **Publication** | 08 May 2015
- Child protection Australia 2012-13 | **Publication** | 25 Jul 2014
- Child protection Australia 2011-12 | **Publication** | 08 Mar 2013
- Child protection Australia 2010-11 | **Publication** | 20 Jan 2012
- Child protection Australia 2009-10 | **Publication** | 21 Jan 2011
- Child protection Australia 2008-09 | **Publication** | 21 Jan 2010
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- Child protection Australia 2002-03 | **Publication** | 22 Jan 2004
- Child protection Australia 2001-02 | **Publication** | 02 Apr 2003
- Child protection Australia 2000-01 | **Publication** | 04 Apr 2002
- Child protection Australia 1999-00 | **Publication** | 10 May 2001
- Child protection Australia 1998-99 | **Publication** | 18 May 2000
- Child protection Australia 1997-98 | **Publication** | 27 Aug 1999

- Child protection Australia 1996-97 |
Publication | 28 Aug 1998
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1995-96 |
Publication | 30 Jun 1997
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1994-95 |
Publication | 01 Apr 1995
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1993-94 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1995
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1992-93 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1994
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1991-92 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1993
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1990-91 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1992
-





Related material

Resources

Safety of children in care (released September 2023)

- [Safety of children in care 2020-21](#)
- [Final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Australian Government response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#)

Related topics

- [Adoptions](#)
 - [Children & youth](#)
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