



2.4 Child protection

In Australia, statutory child protection is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Departments responsible for child protection assist vulnerable children who are suspected of being abused, neglected or harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

Children receiving child protection services

Children may receive a combination of child protection services, including 'investigations', 'care and protection orders', and 'out-of-home care'. Investigations can lead to 'substantiations' if there is sufficient reason to believe that a child has been, or is at risk of being, abused, neglected or harmed. Definitions of key terms are available in the Glossary.

In 2015–16:



- About 162,200 (or **1 in 33**) **Australian children** aged 0–17 **received child protection services**.



- **Children receiving child protection services were most likely to be infants** under the age of 1 (38 per 1,000 children) and were least likely to be aged 15–17 (21 per 1,000).



- **Almost three-quarters** (73%) of children receiving child protection services were **repeat clients**. This means that they had previously been the subject of an investigation or were discharged from a care and protection order or a funded out-of-home care placement.



- **Three in 5** (60%) children receiving child protection services **were subject to an investigation only**; that is, their cases had been, or were in the process of being, assessed to determine whether further intervention was required.

Substantiations

In 2015–16, around 45,700 children were the subject of a substantiation—an increase of 21% over a 5-year period, from about 37,800 in 2011–12. The rate at which children were subject to a substantiation rose from 7.4 per 1,000 children in 2011–12 to 8.5 per 1,000 in 2015–16 (Figure 2.4.1). Emotional abuse was the most common primary type of abuse or neglect substantiated (45%), followed by neglect (25%), physical abuse (18%) and sexual abuse (12%).





Australia's welfare 2017

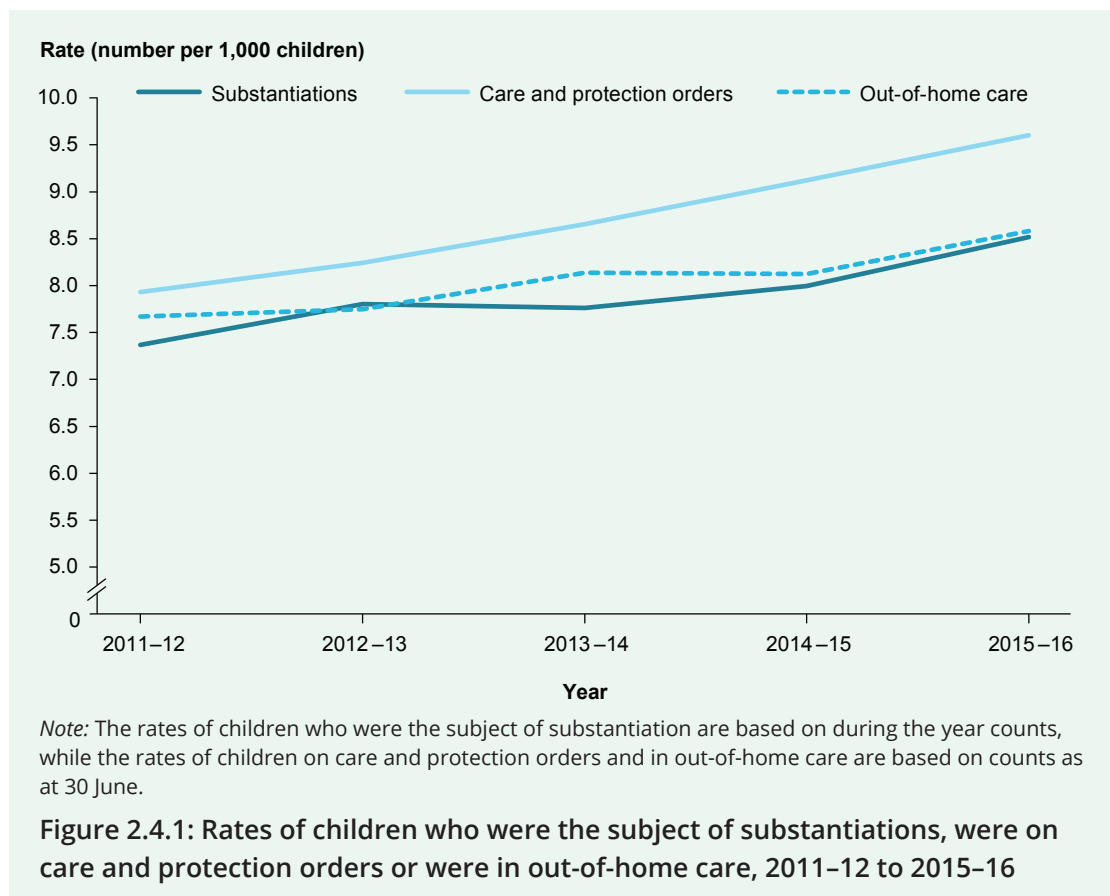
Care and protection orders

About 52,000 children were on care and protection orders as at 30 June 2016—an increase of 27% from around 41,000 as at 30 June 2012. The rate of children on care and protection orders increased over the 5 years to 30 June 2016, from 7.9 to 9.6 per 1,000 children (Figure 2.4.1). Two-thirds (64%) were on finalised guardianship or custody orders (most of which were long term), 19% of children were on third-party parental responsibility orders (again mostly long term), 12% were on interim and temporary orders, and 5.2% were on other types of orders.

Out-of-home care placements and carers

As at 30 June 2016, there were about 46,450 children in out-of-home care—an increase of 17% from 39,600 as at 30 June 2012. There were 7.7 children in out-of-home care per 1,000 children as at 30 June 2012, which rose to 8.6 per 1,000 as at 30 June 2016 (Figure 2.4.1; see also Chapter 2.5 'A stable and secure home for children in out-of-home care').

The vast majority (94%) of children in out-of-home care were in home based care—39% in foster care and 49% in relative/kinship care.





Some groups are over-represented

Compared with non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were:



- 7 times as likely to be the subject of substantiations
- 9 times as likely to be on care and protection orders
- 10 times as likely to be in out-of-home care.

Compared with children living in *Major cities*, children in combined *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were:



- 4 times as likely to be the subject of substantiations
- 2 times as likely to be in out-of-home care.

What is missing from the picture?

The AIHW is continuing work to enhance national child protection reporting in priority areas identified under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (COAG 2009). These efforts include improving data on disability status and cultural and linguistic diversity, and linking to other data sets to measure the health and welfare outcomes for children receiving child protection services. All data which are currently lacking or of unusable quality.

Where do I go for more information?

More information on child protection in Australia is available at www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection/. The report *Child protection Australia 2015–16* is also available for free download at the AIHW website.

Reference

COAG (Council of Australian Governments) 2009. Protecting children is everyone's business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020. Canberra: COAG.

