

4 Out-of-home care

Overview

Children who are placed in out-of-home care

Out-of-home care is one of a range of services provided to children who are in need of care and protection. This service provides alternative accommodation to children and young people who are unable to live with their parents. These arrangements include foster care, placements with relatives or kin, and residential care. In most cases, children in out-of-home care are also on a care and protection order of some kind.

Some children are placed in out-of-home care because they were the subject of a child protection substantiation and require a more protective environment. Other situations in which a child may be placed in out-of-home care include those where parents are incapable of providing adequate care for the child, or where alternative accommodation is needed during times of family conflict. There are no national data available, however, on the reasons children are placed in out-of-home care.

The current emphasis in policy and practice is to keep children with their families wherever possible. Where children, for various reasons, need to be placed in out-of-home care, the practice is to attempt to reunite children with their families. There are a range of intensive family support programs across jurisdictions that seek to prevent the separation of children from their families as a result of child protection concerns, or to reunify families where separation has already occurred. In 2002–03, there were some 57 intensive family support programs operating across Australia – 2 in New South Wales, 36 in Victoria, 4 in Queensland, 3 in Western Australia, 9 in South Australia, 1 in Tasmania and 2 in the Australian Capital Territory.

In Australia, most children who are placed in out-of-home care are eventually reunited with their families (Forwood & Carver 1999:740). If it is necessary to remove a child from his or her family, then placement within the wider family or community is preferred. This is particularly the case with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in order to be consistent with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (see pp 47-48).

Respite care is a form of out-of-home care that is used to provide short-term accommodation for children whose parents are ill or unable to care for them on a temporary basis. Not all jurisdictions can identify which children in out-of-home care are in respite care. Children may also be placed in respite care while being placed with a foster carer.

As with the majority of child protection services, states and territories are responsible for funding out-of-home care. Non-government organisations are widely used, however, to provide these services.

Out-of-home care and court orders

Children can be placed in out-of-home care voluntarily or through some type of court order. Such orders include care and protection orders, including formal administrative

arrangements, and other legal orders such as juvenile justice orders (see Chapter 3). There is considerable variety between the jurisdictions:

- In the Northern Territory, all children in out-of-home care were on a court order or some other form of legal authority.
- In New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, children in out-of-home care can be placed on a range of different orders or authorities. (For example, in South Australia, children needing emergency or respite care are often placed in out-of-home care on the authority of their guardians.)

Although a child may be in out-of-home care in conjunction with being on an order, the order does not necessarily specify where the child must reside or that the child be placed in care.

Scope and coverage of out-of-home care data collection

For the purposes of this collection, ‘out-of-home care’ is defined as out-of-home overnight care for children and young people under 18 years of age, where the state or territory makes a financial payment. This includes placements with relatives (other than parents) but does not include placements made in disability services, medical or psychiatric services, juvenile justice facilities, overnight childcare services or supported accommodation assistance placements. The data exclude children in unfunded placements and children living with parents where the jurisdiction makes a financial payment.

Types of placements

Children in out-of-home care can be placed in a variety of living arrangements. In this collection, the following categories have been used:

- *Home-based care* – where placement is in the home of a carer who is reimbursed for expenses incurred in caring for the child. This category includes:
 - relative/kinship care where the caregiver is a family member or a person with a pre-existing relationship to the child
 - foster or community care
 - other home-based arrangements.
- *Residential care* – where placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placements for children and where there are paid staff. This category includes facilities where there are rostered staff, where there is a live-in carer (including family group homes), and where staff are off-site (for example, a lead tenant or supported residence arrangement), as well as other facility-based arrangements.
- *Independent living* – such as private boarding arrangements.
- *Other* – where the placement type does not fit into the above categories or is unknown.

State and territory differences

There are some differences between the states and territories in the scope and coverage of out-of-home care data. For example, the data from Victoria include children on permanent care orders, since this state makes an ongoing payment for the care of these children.

Data and analysis

There are some data in this section on children admitted to out-of-home care during 2002–03 but most of these data relate to children who were in out-of-home care for the night of 30 June 2003. Australian totals have been provided where possible, although some states and territories were not able to provide data for all tables.

Admissions and discharges

In 2002–03 there were 12,819 children admitted to out-of-home care in Australia, 21 less than in 2001–02 (Table 4.1; AIHW 2003). The number of children admitted to out-of-home care was lower than in 2001–02 in all jurisdictions except Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

Table 4.1: Children admitted to out-of-home care during 2002–03, by age group, Australia

Age (years)	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
< 1	501	386	277	141	124	9	15	32	1,485
1–4	1,106	874	533	203	293	73	87	74	3,243
5–9	1,153	1,051	616	189	385	104	90	41	3,629
10–14	1,073	1,003	535	203	457	74	77	65	3,487
15–17	148	394	148	45	167	26	22	9	959
Unknown	7	—	—	—	—	—	9	—	16
Total	3,988	3,708	2,109	781	1,426	286	300	221	12,819
Per cent									
< 1	13	10	13	18	9	3	5	14	12
1–4	28	24	25	26	21	26	30	33	25
5–9	29	28	29	24	27	36	31	19	28
10–14	27	27	25	26	32	26	26	29	27
15–17	4	11	7	6	12	9	8	4	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The table includes all children admitted to out-of-home care for the first time, as well as those children returning to care who had exited care more than 2 months previously. Children admitted to out-of-home care more than once during the year were only counted once.

Over one-third (37%) of the children admitted to out-of-home care were aged under 5 years, with 12% aged under 1 year. Children aged 15–17 years represented only 7% of all admissions in 2002–03.

Overall, there were fewer children discharged from care than those admitted. Across Australia there were 9,077 children discharged from out-of-home care in 2002–03 (Table 4.2). As would be expected, the age distribution of children discharged from care was considerably older than that of children admitted to out-of-home care. For example, 19% of those discharged from care were aged 15–17 years compared with 7% of those admitted to out-of-home care.

Table 4.2: Number of children discharged from out-of-home care by age group, 2002-03

Age (years)	NSW ^(a)	Vic ^(b)	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
<1	113	248	124	42	94	7	16	16	660
1-4	352	830	216	141	302	29	67	45	1,982
5-9	343	1,011	249	131	363	43	75	20	2,235
10-14	404	897	316	163	470	42	67	40	2,399
15-17	418	659	214	141	280	53	19	8	1,748
Unknown	—	—	—	—	—	—	9	—	53
Total	1,630	3,645	1,119	618	1,509	174	253	129	9,077
Per cent									
<1	7	7	11	7	6	4	7	12	7
1-4	22	23	19	23	20	17	27	35	22
5-9	21	28	22	21	24	25	31	16	25
10-14	25	25	28	26	31	24	27	31	27
15-17	26	18	19	23	19	30	8	6	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) The data are estimated figures. Persons aged 18 years are included in the 15-17 age group.

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

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

Trends in numbers in out-of-home care

At 30 June 2003 there were 20,297 children in out-of-home care in Australia (Table 4.3). This compares with 18,880 children who were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2002, an increase of 8%. The number of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2003 was higher than at 30 June 2002 in all jurisdictions except Tasmania. This is because the data for Tasmania no longer includes a significant number of children who live with relatives because of an informal arrangement made with their parents. These children are not the subject of a care and protection orders and out of home care services did not arrange their placement with relatives.

The number of children in out-of-home care in Australia at 30 June has increased each year since 1996 when there were 13,979 children in out-of-home care (Table 4.3). Between 1996 and 2003 the number of children in out-of-home care in Australia increased by 45%. There was an increase in numbers in all jurisdictions over this period with the exception of Tasmania. Again, this is because the data for Tasmania no longer includes a significant number of children who live with relatives because of an informal arrangement made with their parents. Taking these children into account, Tasmania also experienced an increase in the number of children in out of home care.

Table 4.3: Number of children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care, by state and territory, 30 June 1996 to 30 June 2003

At 30 June	NSW	Vic	Qld ^(a)	WA	SA	Tas ^(b)	ACT	NT	Total
1996	5,437	3,385	2,110	1,206	1,064	508	181	88	13,979
1997	5,486	3,393	2,211	1,050	1,193	461	173	111	14,078
1998	5,603	3,615	2,346	1,093	1,055	442	179	137	14,470
1999	6,359	3,581	2,613	1,192	1,045	533	174	177	15,674
2000	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923
2001	7,786	3,882	3,011	1,436	1,175	572	215	164	18,241
2002	8,084	3,918	3,257	1,494	1,196	544	224	163	18,880
2003	8,636	4,046	3,787	1,615	1,245	468	277	223	20,297

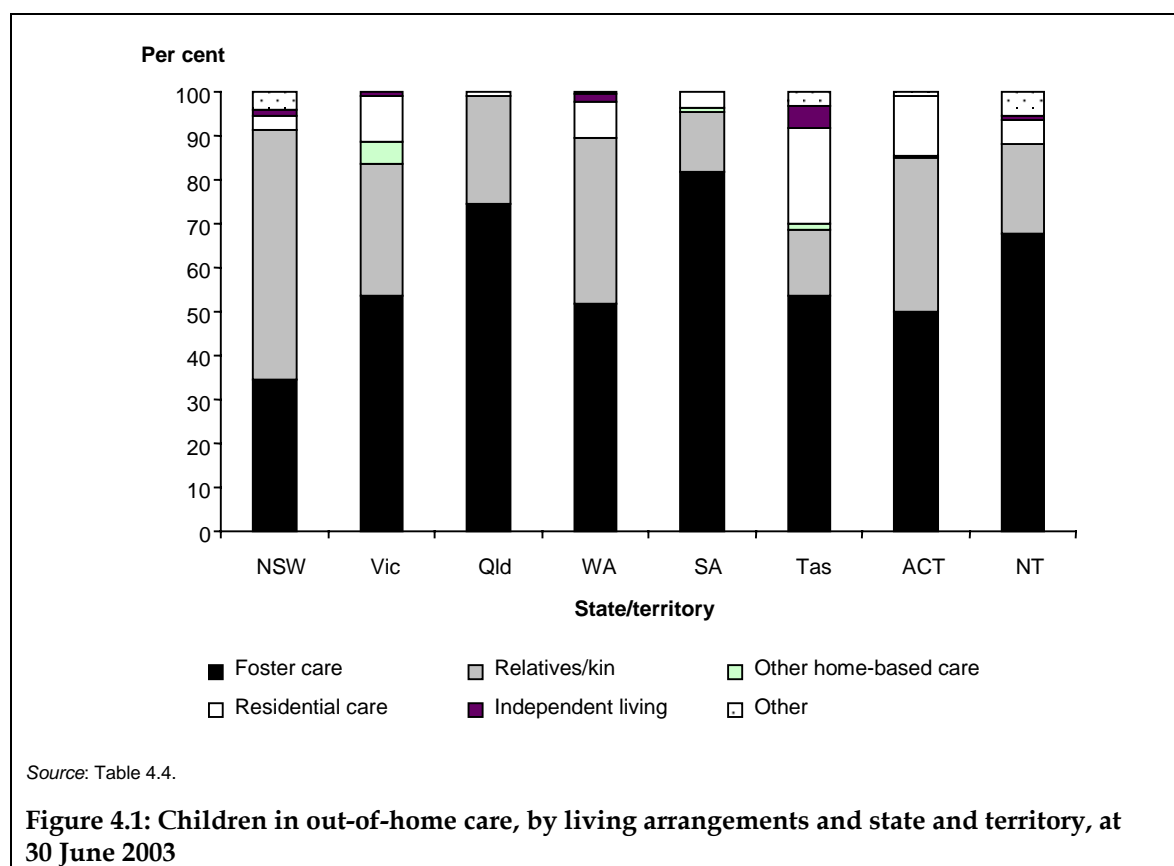
(a) The 1996 data for Queensland include only those children in out-of-home care who were on a care and protection order. The data for the years 1997 to 2000 include only those children who were on a care and protection order or remanded in temporary custody. From 2001, the data include all children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

(b) The number of children in out-of-home care in Tasmania for 2003 should not be compared with previous years, as a group of children who did not meet the definition of out-of-home care were excluded from this year's collection. These children are not the subject of a care and protection orders and out of home care services did not arrange their placement with relatives.

Sources: AIHW 2003; Table 4.4.

Characteristics of children in out-of-home care

Most children (92%) in out-of-home care at 30 June 2003 were in home-based care (Table 4.4). Only 5% were placed in residential care and 1% in independent living. Of those in home-based care, 51% were in foster care, 40% in relative/kinship care and 1% in some other type of home-based care (Table 4.4). The high proportion of children in home-based care reflects the trends in recent decades of increased use of placements with relatives and kin or foster carers, and decreased use of placements in residential care (Johnstone 2001).



The proportion of children in out-of-home care who were living in residential care was 5% Australia-wide and ranged from 1% in Queensland to 22% in Tasmania. Note that residential care includes family group homes that may have an average of only 4 children living together and residential establishments with under 10 children. The principle of keeping sibling groups together can also result in placements in residential care. In many jurisdictions, priority is given to keeping siblings together, which sometimes results in periods of residential care for larger family groups.

Compared with other jurisdictions, South Australia had a relatively high proportion of children in foster care (82%), and New South Wales had a relatively high proportion of children placed with relatives or kin (57%) (Figure 4.1).

Table 4.4: Children in out-of-home care: type of placement, by state and territory, at 30 June 2003

Type of placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA ^(a)	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
Foster care	2,968	2,172	2,815	836	1,018	250	138	151	10,348
Relatives/kin	4,929	1,216	929	607	173	71	98	46	8,069
Other home-based care	—	201	—	—	8	7	1	—	217
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>7,897</i>	<i>3,589</i>	<i>3,744</i>	<i>1,443</i>	<i>1,199</i>	<i>328</i>	<i>237</i>	<i>197</i>	<i>18,634</i>
Residential care	267	420	43	136	46	102	37	12	1,063
Independent living	119	37	—	29	—	23	—	2	210
Other ^(b)	353	—	—	7	—	15	3	12	390
Total	8,636	4,046	3,787	1,615	1,245	468	277	223	20,297
Per cent									
Foster care	34	54	74	52	82	53	50	68	51
Relatives/kin	57	30	25	38	14	15	35	21	40
Other home-based care	—	5	—	—	1	1	—	—	1
<i>Total home-based care</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>92</i>
Residential care	3	10	1	8	4	22	13	5	5
Independent living	1	1	—	2	—	5	—	1	1
Other ^(b)	4	—	—	—	—	3	1	5	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

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

(b) 'Other' includes unknown living arrangements.

Age and sex

Around one-third (32%) of children in out-of-home care were aged 10–14 years (Table A1.8). A further 31% were aged 5–9 years, 23% were aged under 5 years and 14% were aged 15–17 years. Just over half (52%) of all children in out-of-home care were boys, although girls outnumbered boys in the Northern Territory (Table A1.9).

Children in residential care were considerably older than children in home-based care: 46% of children in residential care were aged 10–14 years and 35% were aged 15–17 years, whereas 32% of children in home-based care were aged 10–14 years and 11% were aged 15–17 years (Table A1.10). Only 6% of children in residential care in Australia were aged under 5 years compared with 24% of those in home-based care. In South Australia there were no children aged under 5 years in residential care.

Whether children were on an order

As previously noted, in the Northern Territory all children in out-of-home care were on care and protection orders or authorities. In other jurisdictions, the proportion of children in out-of-home care who were on care and protection orders ranged from 70% in Western Australia to 95% in the Australian Capital Territory (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Children in out-of-home care: whether the child was on an order, by state and territory, at 30 June 2003

Whether the child was on an order	NSW	Vic ^(a)	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
On care and protection order	7,788	3,087	3,268	1,136	1,005	376	264	223	17,147
On another type of order	—	107	2	—	240	10	3	—	362
<i>Total children on orders</i>	<i>7,788</i>	<i>3,194</i>	<i>3,270</i>	<i>1,136</i>	<i>1,245</i>	<i>386</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>223</i>	<i>17,509</i>
Not on an order	848	817	517	479	—	82	10	—	2,753
Total	8,636	4,011	3,787	1,615	1,245	468	277	223	20,262
Per cent									
On care and protection order	90	77	86	70	81	80	95	100	85
On another type of order	—	3	—	—	19	2	1	—	2
<i>Total children on orders</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>86</i>
Not on an order	10	20	14	30	—	18	4	—	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) The data from Victoria include estimates from some data sources.

Length of time in placement

The proportion of children in Australia who had been in out-of-home care for 5 years or more at 30 June 2003 was 22%, but this ranged from 4% in Tasmania to 32% in Western Australia (Table 4.6). Overall, 51% of children had been in out-of-home care for less than 2 years.

Respite care refers to out-of-home care that is provided on a temporary basis for reasons other than child protection: for example, when parents are ill or unable to care for the child for short periods of time. Not all jurisdictions, however, could identify whether children were in respite care. Where it was known that children were in respite care, they were included in the category 'less than 1 month'.

Table 4.6: Children in out-of-home care: length of time in continuous placement, by state and territory, at 30 June 2003

Time in continuous placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
< 1 month	989	202	420	43	130	77	29	17	1,907
1 month to < 6 months	821	603	890	148	256	179	52	20	2,969
6 months to < 1 year	798	512	579	156	147	76	19	43	2,330
1 year to < 2 years	1,118	655	628	249	178	49	44	29	2,950
2 years to < 5 years	2,737	1,186	727	508	257	66	55	73	5,609
5 years or more	2,159	838	543	511	277	20	78	37	4,463
Not stated/unknown	14	50	—	—	—	1	—	4	69
Total	8,636	4,046	3,787	1,615	1,245	468	277	223	20,297
Per cent									
< 1 month	11	5	11	3	10	16	10	8	9
1 month to < 6 months	10	15	24	9	21	38	19	9	15
6 months to < 1 year	9	13	15	10	12	16	7	20	12
1 year to < 2 years	13	16	17	15	14	10	16	13	15
2 years to < 5 years	32	30	19	31	21	14	20	33	28
5 years or more	25	21	14	32	22	4	28	17	22
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: In those jurisdictions where children in out-of-home care for respite reasons could be identified, they were included in the 'less than 1 month' category: New South Wales (855 children), Victoria (35 children), South Australia (5 children) and the Australian Capital Territory (3 children).

Rates of children in out-of-home care

There were 4.2 children per 1,000 aged 0-17 years in out-of-home care in Australia at 30 June 2003, an increase from a rate of 3.9 in 2002 (Table 4.7). The rates of children in out-of-home care varied by state and territory and ranged from 3.3 per 1,000 in Western Australia to 5.4 per 1,000 in New South Wales. The reasons for this variation are likely to include differences in the policies and practices of the community services departments in relation to out-of-home care, as well as variations in the availability of appropriate care options for children who are regarded as being in need of this service.

Table 4.7: Rates of children in out-of-home care, per 1,000 children, by state and territory, 30 June 1997 to 30 June 2003

At 30 June	NSW	Vic	Qld ^(a)	WA	SA	Tas ^(b)	ACT	NT	Total
1997	3.4	3.0	2.5	2.2	3.2	3.7	2.1	1.9	3.0
1998	3.5	3.2	2.6	2.3	2.8	3.6	2.2	2.3	3.1
1999	4.0	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.9	4.4	2.2	3.0	3.3
2000	4.5	3.4	2.9	2.8	3.2	4.6	2.6	3.0	3.6
2001	4.9	3.4	3.3	3.0	3.3	4.8	2.8	2.7	3.9
2002	5.0	3.4	3.5	3.1	3.4	4.6	2.8	2.7	3.9
2003	5.4	3.5	4.0	3.3	3.6	4.0	3.6	3.8	4.2

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

(b) The number of children in out-of-home care in Tasmania for 2003 should not be compared to previous years as a group of children who did not meet the definition of out-of-home care were excluded from this year's collection. These children are not the subject of a care and protection orders and out of home care services did not arrange their placement with relatives.

Sources: AIHW 2003.

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

The rate of children in out-of-home care in Australia increased from 3.0 per 1,000 at 30 June 1997 to 4.2 per 1,000 at 30 June 2003 (Table 4.7). Over the period from 1997 to 2003, the rates of children in out-of-home care increased in all jurisdictions. The increase was largest in New South Wales where rates increased from 3.4 to 5.4 per 1,000, and in the Northern Territory where they increased from 1.9 to 3.8.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2003 there were 4,750 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, an increase of 551 since 30 June 2002 (Table 4.8; AIHW 2003). The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2003 was 22.8 per 1,000 aged 0–17 years, ranging from 5.3 per 1,000 in Tasmania to 40.5 per 1,000 in Victoria.

Table 4.8: Children in out-of-home care: number and rate per 1,000 children aged 0–17 years by Indigenous status and state and territory, at 30 June 2003

State/territory	Number of children			Rate per 1,000 children			Rate ratio Indigenous /other
	Indigenous	Other	Total	Indigenous	Other	Total	
New South Wales	2,375	6,261	8,636	38.1	4.1	5.4	9.3:1
Victoria	507	3,539	4,046	40.5	3.1	3.5	13.1:1
Queensland	813	2,974	3,787	14.0	3.4	4.0	4.1:1
Western Australia ^(a)	570	1,045	1,615	19.2	2.2	3.3	8.7:1
South Australia	252	993	1,245	22.0	3.1	3.6	7.1:1
Tasmania	43	425	468	5.3	3.9	4.0	1.4:1
Australian Capital Territory	48	229	277	27.4	3.0	3.6	9.1:1
Northern Territory	142	81	223	5.9	2.3	3.8	2.6:1
Australia	4,750	15,547	20,297	22.8	3.4	4.2	6.7:1

(a) During 2001–02, practices were introduced to improve the identification of Indigenous status that resulted in an increase in the number of Indigenous clients.

Note: The Indigenous rates for 2003 were calculated using 2001 Census data. These rates should not be compared with the Indigenous rates published for previous years. For details on the calculation of rates and the coding of Indigenous status, see Appendix 2.

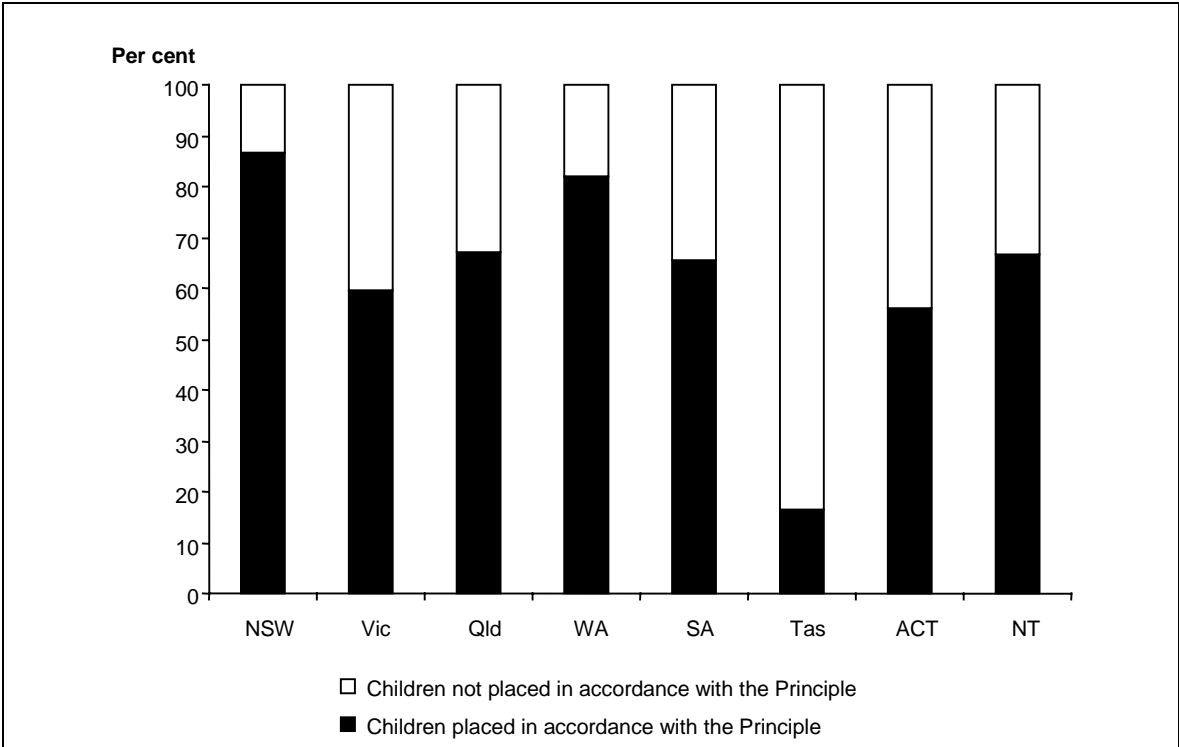
In all jurisdictions there were higher rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care than other Australian children. In Victoria, the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was 13 times the rate for other children, and in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory it was 9 times the rate (Table 4.8).

Indigenous status of caregivers

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

- with the child’s extended family
- within the child’s Indigenous community
- with other Indigenous people.

All jurisdictions have adopted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle either in legislation or policy. The impact of the Principle is reflected in the relatively high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives in many jurisdictions (Figure 4.2).



Source: Table 4.9.

Figure 4.2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by whether placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, 30 June 2003

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were placed with either an Indigenous carer or a relative, for example, was 87% in New South Wales and 82% in Western Australia (Table 4.9). The relatively low proportion of Indigenous children who

were placed with an Indigenous carer in Tasmania is probably related to the small size of the Indigenous population as well as issues related to the identification of Indigenous status in that state.

Table 4.9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care: Indigenous status and relationship of carer, by state and territory, at 30 June 2003

Relationship	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	Number								
Indigenous relative/kin	1,340	104	323	286	39	—	19	51	2,162
Other Indigenous caregiver	371	75	198	114	113	1	5	43	920
Other Australian relative/kin	322	65	19	37	13	6	3	n.a. (a)	465
Indigenous residential care	11	12	6	26	—	—	—	—	55
<i>Total in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle</i>	<i>2,044</i>	<i>256</i>	<i>546</i>	<i>463</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>3,602</i>
Other Australian caregiver	281	149	265	78	84	18	14	39	928
Other residential care	33	25	2	23	3	17	7	8	118
<i>Total not placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>174</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>1,046</i>
Total	2,358	430	813	564	252	42	48	141	4,648
	Per cent								
Indigenous relative/kin	57	24	40	51	15	—	40	36	47
Other Indigenous caregiver	16	17	24	20	45	2	10	30	20
Other Australian relative/kin	14	15	2	7	5	14	6	n.a. (a)	10
Indigenous residential care	—	3	1	5	—	—	—	—	1
<i>Total in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>77</i>
Other Australian caregiver	12	35	33	14	33	43	29	28	20
Other residential care	1	6	—	4	1	40	15	6	3
<i>Total not placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>23</i>
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

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

Notes

1. This table does not include Indigenous children who were living independently or whose living arrangements were unknown.
2. For details on coding of Indigenous status, see Appendix 2.