

**Child protection
Australia 2002–03**

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These agencies contributed substantially to the content of this report.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
NCPASS	National Child Protection and Support Services Data Group

Symbols used in the tables

–	nil or rounded to zero
..	not applicable
n.a.	not available

Notes

1. Percentages in all tables exclude unknowns.
2. Percentages in tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.
3. All tables in this report use data provided by state and territory community services departments.
4. Tables with the prefix 'A' in the title are located in Appendix 1.

Summary

This report is based on the following three national child protection data collections:

- child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations
- children on care and protection orders
- children in out-of-home care.

These data are collected each year by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) from the community services departments in each state and territory. Most of the data in this report cover the 2002–03 financial year, although data on trends in child protection are also included.

Each state and territory has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to child protection, which accounts for some of the differences between jurisdictions in the data provided. Australian totals have not been provided for those data that are not comparable across the states and territories.

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

- Over the last 4 years the number of child protection notifications in Australia increased from 107,134 in 1999–00 to 198,355 in 2002–03. From 2001–02 to 2002–03 the number of notifications increased in all jurisdictions except Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (Table 2.3).
- The number of substantiations in Australia also increased over the last four years, rising from 24,732 in 1999–00 to 40,416 in 2002–03 (Table 2.4).
- Rates of children aged 0–16 years who were the subjects of child protection substantiations in 2002–03 ranged from 1.8 per 1,000 in Tasmania to 10.1 per 1,000 in Queensland (Table 2.7).
- Between 2001–02 and 2002–03 the rates of children who were the subject of a substantiation increased in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (Table 2.7).
- Although the quality of the data on Indigenous status varies between states and territories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were clearly over-represented in the child protection system. The rate of Indigenous children in substantiations, for example, was nearly ten times the rate for other children in Victoria and seven times the rate in Western Australia (Table 2.9).

Children on care and protection orders

- There was a continuing upward trend Australia-wide in the number of children on care and protection orders increasing from 15,718 at 30 June 1997 to 22,130 at 30 June 2003 (Table 3.5).

- At 30 June 2003 there were 4.6 children aged 0–17 years per 1,000 on care and protection orders, rising from 3.3 per 1,000 in 1997 (Table 3.9).
- Between 2002 and 2003 the rate of children on care and protection orders increased from 4.3 to 4.6 per 1,000 (Table 3.9).
- There was some variation across jurisdictions in the rate of children on orders, ranging from 3.0 per 1,000 in Western Australia to 5.6 per 1,000 in New South Wales in 2002–03 (Table 3.9).
- Across Australia the rate of Indigenous children on care and protection orders was six times the rate for other Australian children (Table 3.10).

Children in out-of-home care

- The number of children in out-of-home care rose each year from 1996 to 2003, the period for which national data has been collected. The numbers in care increased by 45% from 13,979 at 30 June 1997 to 20,297 at 30 June 2003 (Table 4.3).
- 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).
- In 2002–03 rates of children in out-of-home care ranged from 3.3 per 1,000 in Western Australia to 5.4 per 1,000 in New South Wales (Table 4.7).
- Only 5% of children in care at 30 June 2003 were in residential care, with 51% in foster care and 40% in relative or kinship care (Table 4.4).
- The rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was nearly seven times the rate of other Australian children (Table 4.8).