



Australia's welfare 2017

## 2.6 Youth justice supervision

Young people who commit, or allegedly commit, a crime may be dealt with under the youth justice system. In Australia, youth justice is the responsibility of state and territory governments, and each jurisdiction has its own legislation, policies and practices. However, the general processes by which young people are charged and sentenced, and the types of legal orders available to the courts, are similar.

Young people can be charged with a criminal offence if they are aged 10 and older. The upper age limit for treatment as a young person is 17 in all states and territories except Queensland, where it is 16. Some young people aged 18 and older are also involved in the youth justice system. This may be due to the offence being committed when the person was aged 17 or younger, with supervision continuing once they turn 18.

### Young people under youth justice supervision

On an average day in 2015–16, 5,482 young people aged 10 and older were under youth justice supervision in Australia, with a total of 11,007 supervised at some time during the year. Among people aged 10–17, this equates to a rate of 21 young people per 10,000 population, or about 1 in every 476 young people being under supervision on an average day.

Most young people under youth justice supervision on an average day were supervised in the community (84%). Although 17% were in detention on an average day (some were supervised in both the community and detention on the same day), more than 2 in every 5 young people (44%) under supervision experienced detention at some time during the year.

Young people may be supervised when they are unsentenced—that is, when they have been charged with an offence and are awaiting the outcome of their court matter, or when they have been found, or have pleaded, guilty and are awaiting sentencing. In 2015–16, more than half (57%) of young people in detention on an average day were unsentenced.

### Some groups are over-represented

Compared with non-Indigenous young people, on an average day, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were:



- 17 times as likely to be under supervision
- 15 times as likely to be supervised in the community
- 25 times as likely to be in detention.

Compared with young females, on an average day, young males were:



- 4 times as likely to be under supervision
- 4 times as likely to be supervised in the community
- 8 times as likely to be in detention.





Compared with young people living in *Major cities*, on an average day, people in *Very remote* areas were:



- 10 times as likely to be under supervision
- 10 times as likely to be supervised in the community
- 9 times as likely to be in detention.

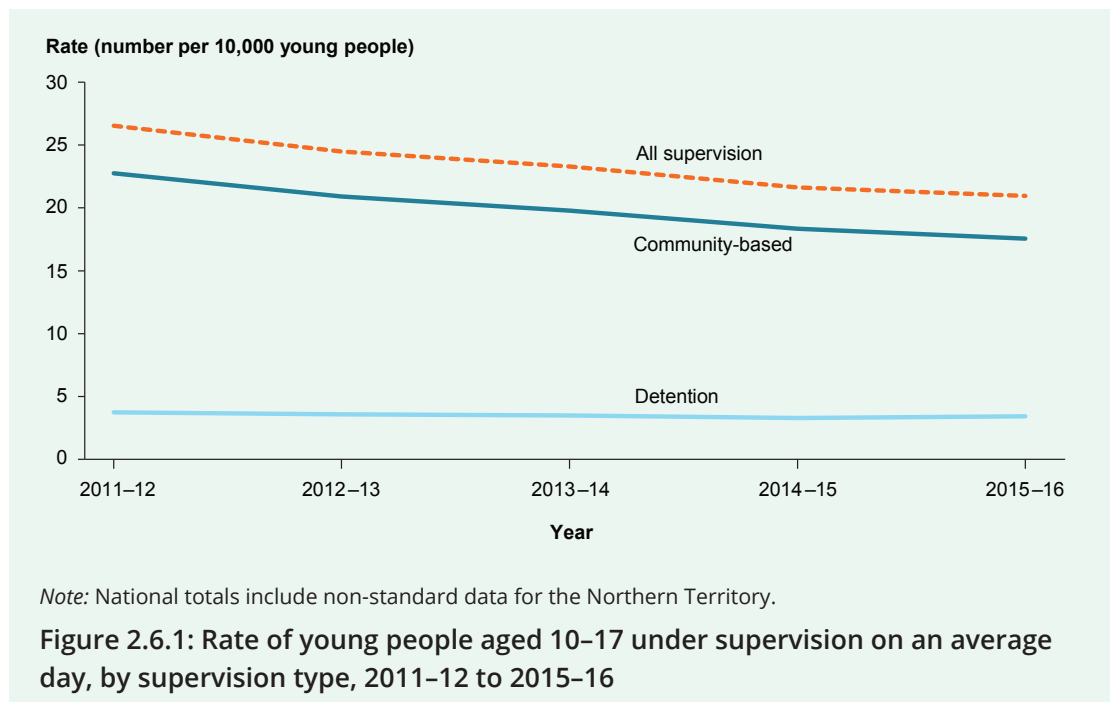
Compared with young people living in the highest socioeconomic areas, on an average day, young people living in the lowest socioeconomic areas were:



- 6 times as likely to be under supervision
- 7 times as likely to be supervised in the community
- 6 times as likely to be in detention.

## Fewer young people under supervision

Over the 5-year period from 2011–12 to 2015–16, the number of young people aged 10 and over under supervision on an average day fell by 21% (from 6,959 to 5,482), while the rate of those aged 10–17 under supervision fell from 27 to 21 per 10,000 (Figure 2.6.1). The number of young people aged 10 and over in community-based supervision on an average day fell by 23% (from 5,970 to 4,598) while the rate of those aged 10–17 fell from 23 to 18 per 10,000. Among those in detention, the numbers and rates also fell during the 5-year period, although to a lesser degree. The number of young people aged 10 and over in detention fell by 11% (from 1,024 to 914) and the rate among those aged 10–17 went from 4 to 3 per 10,000.





## Time under supervision

When all time spent under supervision is considered, young people who were supervised during 2015–16 spent a total of 182 days—or about 6 months, on average—under supervision. The average length of time under supervision has remained stable over the last 5 years, ranging between 180 and 182 days.

Young people spent more time, on average, under community-based supervision during the year (171 days) than in detention (69 days). For young people in detention, sentenced detention lasted substantially longer (103 days on average) than unsentenced detention (44 days).

## Returns to sentenced supervision

Most young people who receive a supervised youth justice sentence serve only 1 sentence, and do not return to sentenced youth justice supervision. Of young people under sentenced youth justice supervision from 2000–01 to 2015–16 and born between 1990–91 to 1997–98, 61% received only 1 supervised sentence before the age of 18.

A sizeable minority of young people who entered sentenced youth justice supervision went on to receive a total of 5 or more supervised sentences before they turned 18. For young people whose first supervised sentence was detention, more than 1 in 4 (27%) received a total of 5 or more supervised sentences, compared with 1 in 7 (15%) of young people whose first supervised sentence was community based.

## Involvement with child protection services

Some young people under youth justice supervision are also involved with the child protection system. Young people aged 10–17 under youth justice supervision during 2014–15 were 15 times as likely as the general population to be involved with the child protection system in the same year. Similarly, young people involved with the child protection system were 14 times as likely as the general population to be under youth justice supervision in the same year.

## What is missing from the picture?

Data are limited on the health and welfare status and health service use of young people under supervision, and on their health and wellbeing outcomes once they exit youth justice supervision. Information on the pathways between youth justice supervision and adult correctives services is currently not available, due to the current lack of linkable national data on adult corrective services. The Northern Territory did not provide standard data for the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set in 2015–16, but non-standard data have been included in national totals where possible. The AIHW will be working with the Northern Territory to enable the provision of standard data in future years. Non-standard data are not included in some analyses (such as for remoteness or socioeconomic areas) or data linkage studies, due to issues around completeness and comparability with standard data.

## Where do I go for more information?

More information on youth justice in Australia is available at [www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/](http://www.aihw.gov.au/youth-justice/). Recent youth justice publications, including the *Youth justice in Australia 2015–16* bulletin and state fact sheets are also available for free download at the AIHW Youth justice in Australia 2015–16 page at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129558624>.

