

**Child protection and
out-of-home care
performance indicators**

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Abbreviations

ACPP	Aboriginal Child Placement Principle
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CSMAC	Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council
DoCS	Department of Community Services (New South Wales)
DFC	Department for Families and Communities (South Australia)
NCPASS	National Child Protection and Support Services (Data Group)
PSSWG	Protection and Support Services Working Group
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SCRCSSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

Symbols used in tables

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

Note: Percentages in tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Executive summary

Purpose of the report

This report was produced in response to a recommendation by the National Child Protection and Support Services (NCPASS) Data Group to provide a detailed description of performance indicators in the areas of child protection and out-of-home care. The report endeavours to aid interpretation of the national performance indicator data for the years 1999–00 to 2004–05 presented in the *Report on government services* (SCRGSP 2005, 2006).

Content of the report

The report describes the history of child protection and out-of-home care performance indicators as well as the current performance indicator framework used in Australia, where service performance is assessed in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Chapter 2). Efficiency and effectiveness indicators are reported annually by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision in the *Report on government services*. The data used to populate these indicators come from a variety of sources. The Productivity Commission, in its role as Secretariat for the Review of Government Service Provision, collects some data directly from the states and territories while other data are supplied via the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

Eight effectiveness indicators are discussed in this report (Chapter 3). An overview of how each state and territory is performing in regard to these indicators is provided in Chapter 4. However, not all jurisdictions measure each of the established indicators, and those that do, do not necessarily measure them in the same manner. Given this lack of comparability across jurisdictions, each state and territory is discussed independently. There are numerous variables which might affect the effectiveness of service provision including policy, legislation, funding and resources. Measurement of effectiveness will be affected by method of data collection. Some of these factors will be discussed to help explain data trends within jurisdictions. The report concludes with a discussion of future directions for the performance indicator framework in the area of child protection and out-of-home care in Australia (Chapter 5). Detailed tables are included in Appendix 1 and target population data are included in Appendix 2.

Analysis

Because of the different policies, practices and data recording mechanisms, data from the different jurisdictions cannot be directly compared. In addition, often legislation and practice changes within jurisdictions mean different years within a jurisdiction can not be meaningfully compared. Some information, however, can be gathered from trends across Australia. Across the years there were consistencies across states and territories for a number of indicators. For example, most jurisdictions had a reasonably stable substantiation rate despite the number of notifications and investigations increasing over the years. The consistent substantiation rate within each jurisdiction suggests that the range of severity of reports to the department remained fairly stable across time – that is, the same proportion warranted substantiation (see the Glossary for definitions of terms such as substantiation and resubstantiation).

Summary of findings

The following is a summary of Chapter 4, which provides interpretations for each state and territory's data for the eight performance indicators discussed in this report.

The **substantiation rate** is the proportion of finalised investigations resulting in a conclusion that a child has been or is likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise suffer harm. Substantiation rates varied between 25% and 74% across the states and territories over the 6 years presented in this report. However, within most jurisdictions rates remained fairly stable over this period. Differences in substantiation rates between jurisdictions is a reflection of the disparity in criteria used to determine whether a notification is investigated or if it is dealt with by referral to another service. Similarly, in jurisdictions where substantiation rates varied during the 6 years, changes in policy and recording systems can be identified which corresponded to fluctuations in the number of substantiations.

Across all years and jurisdictions, **resubstantiation rates** were between 2% and 17% at 3 months and between 4% and 35% at 12 months. The **substantiation rate following a decision not to substantiate** was generally lower than the resubstantiation rate and ranged between less than 1% and 12% at 3 months and between 5% and 35% at 12 months. The higher figures at 12 months reflect the longer time elapsed. In addition, some jurisdictions had very low rates of resubstantiation at 3 months due to policies of not instigating another report while one is still open.

With regards to **safety in out-of-home care**, the proportion of children in out-of-home care who were the subject of substantiation where the person believed responsible was living in the same household was relatively high in Queensland. This proportion increased in Queensland from 2% of all children in out-of-home care in 1999–00 to 8% in 2003–04 and 2004–05, while the other jurisdictions that provided these data all had rates lower than 1%. However, care should be taken in comparing these data across jurisdictions due to variations in recording and collection methods.

In 2004–05, the proportion of **children placed with extended family** varied from 18% in the Northern Territory to 57% in New South Wales. The low rate in the Northern Territory is influenced by the relatively low numbers of non-Indigenous children that were placed with extended family, which may be due to the lack of available relatives in non-Indigenous families. In most jurisdictions, this indicator increased over the years, reflecting recent policies promoting placement of children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with relatives or kin.

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **children placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle** varied considerably across jurisdictions. For example, in 2004–05, the proportion of Indigenous children placed in accordance with the Principle ranged from 27% in Tasmania to 87% in New South Wales. There were also significant differences between states and territories in the proportions of Indigenous children placed with relatives and the proportion placed with other Indigenous carers.

With regards to **stability of placement**, in the states and territories in which this indicator was reported, children who exited care after a longer period in care had typically experienced more placements.

In all jurisdictions except Tasmania, between 88% and 100% of **children under 12 years of age in out-of-home care** were placed in home-based care across the 6 years recorded. In Tasmania, between 73% and 90% were recorded as being placed in home-based care. The generally lower figures in Tasmania are an example of how different policies and practices can influence child protection performance indicator data. Although family group homes are

not included in the AIHW definition of home-based care, in Tasmania a family group home is considered similar to foster care, which is classified as home-based care.

Future directions

NCPASS are currently developing nine new indicators to improve evaluation of the effectiveness of child protection and out-of-home care services (SCRGSP 2005).

Indicators under development are:

- continuity of case worker
- response time to commence investigation
- response time to complete investigation
- local placement
- placement with sibling
- children with documented case plan
- safe return home
- permanent care
- improved education, health and wellbeing of the child.

A description of each of these indicators is presented in Chapter 5.