

**Child protection
Australia 2003–04**

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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

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 2003–04 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 5 years the number of child protection notifications in Australia more than doubled from 107,134 in 1999–00 to 219,384 in 2003–04. From 2002–03 to 2003–04 the number of notifications increased in all jurisdictions except Victoria (Table 2.3). Some of this increase reflects changes in child protection policies and practices in the jurisdictions.
- The number of substantiations in most jurisdictions also increased over the last 5 years, the most notable being Queensland, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (Table 2.4). Again, this increase is affected by changes in policies and practices in the various jurisdictions. It is also an indication of a better awareness of child protection concerns in the wider community and more willingness to report problems to the child protection departments.
- Rates of children aged 0–16 years who were the subject of a child protection substantiation in 2003–04 ranged from 2.0 per 1,000 in Western Australia to 14.0 per 1,000 in Queensland (Table 2.6).
- Between 2002–03 and 2003–04 the rates of children who were the subject of a substantiation increased in all jurisdictions (Table 2.6).
- 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 over eight times the rate in South Australia (Table 2.8).

Children on care and protection orders

- There were more children on care and protection orders in 2003–04 than 2002–03 in every jurisdiction that provided data (Table 3.5).
- At 30 June 2004 the rates of children aged 0–17 years per 1,000 on care and protection orders ranged from 3.4 in Western Australia to 5.8 in the Northern Territory (Table 3.9).
- Across Australia the rates of Indigenous children on care and protection orders were higher than for non-Indigenous children. For example, the rate was 11 times higher in Victoria and 8 times higher in Western Australia (Table 3.10).

Children in out-of-home care

- Nationally, the number of children in out-of-home care rose each year from 1996 to 2004, the period for which national data have been collected. The numbers in care increased by 56% from 13,979 at 30 June 1996 to 21,795 at 30 June 2004 (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 4.5 per 1,000 at 30 June 2004 (Table 4.7).
- In 2003–04 the rates of children in out-of-home care ranged from 3.5 per 1,000 in Western Australia and South Australia to 5.7 per 1,000 in New South Wales (Table 4.7).
- Only 4% of children in care at 30 June 2004 were in residential care, with 53% 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 children (Table 4.8).