

1 Background

Child protection is the responsibility of the community services department in each state and territory. Children who come into contact with these departments for protective reasons include those:

- who are suspected of being, have been or are being abused, neglected or otherwise harmed
- whose parents cannot or are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

The community services departments provide assistance to these children and their families through the provision of, or referral to, a wide range of services. Some of these services are targeted specifically at children in need of protection (and their families); others are available to a wider section of the population and attempt to deal with a broad range of issues or problems.

This report provides national data on children who come into contact with the community services departments for protective reasons. The three areas of the child protection system for which national data are collected are:

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

A limited amount of data is collected on intensive family support services. However, there are no data at the national level on children who are referred to or who access other services for protective reasons.

Child protection systems

Reporting of child protection matters

Currently, all states and territories have some level of legislation requiring the compulsory reporting to community services departments of harm due to child abuse or neglect. The breadth of professionals and organisations mandated to report varies widely across the jurisdictions. For example, in Western Australia only a few professionals are mandated to report (see Appendix 4 for more information on mandatory reporting). On the other hand, in the Northern Territory anyone who has reason to believe that a child may be abused or neglected must report this to the appropriate authority.

The types of child protection matters that are reported also vary across jurisdictions. (Details of the mandatory reporting requirements in each state or territory are set out in Appendix 4.) In addition to requirements under state and territory legislation, Family Court staff are also required under the *Family Law Act 1975* to report all suspected cases of child abuse.

Police also have some responsibility for child protection in each state and territory, although the extent of their responsibility varies in each jurisdiction. Generally, they are involved in child abuse or neglect of a criminal nature, that is, where there is significant sexual or

physical abuse, or any abuse that results in the serious injury or death of a child. In some states or territories there are protocols or informal arrangements whereby the police are involved in joint investigations with the relevant community services department.

Other areas of government also play a role in child protection. Health services support the assessment of child protection matters and deliver therapeutic, counselling and other services. The education sector in many jurisdictions undertakes preventive work with children and families, and also plays an important role in the identification of suspected harm. In some jurisdictions, childcare services are specifically provided for children in the child protection system.

The child protection process

Although each jurisdiction has its own legislation, policies and practices in relation to child protection, the processes used to protect children are broadly similar. Figure 1.1 shows a simplified version of the main processes used in child protection systems across Australia. These are outlined in more detail below.

Reports to the department

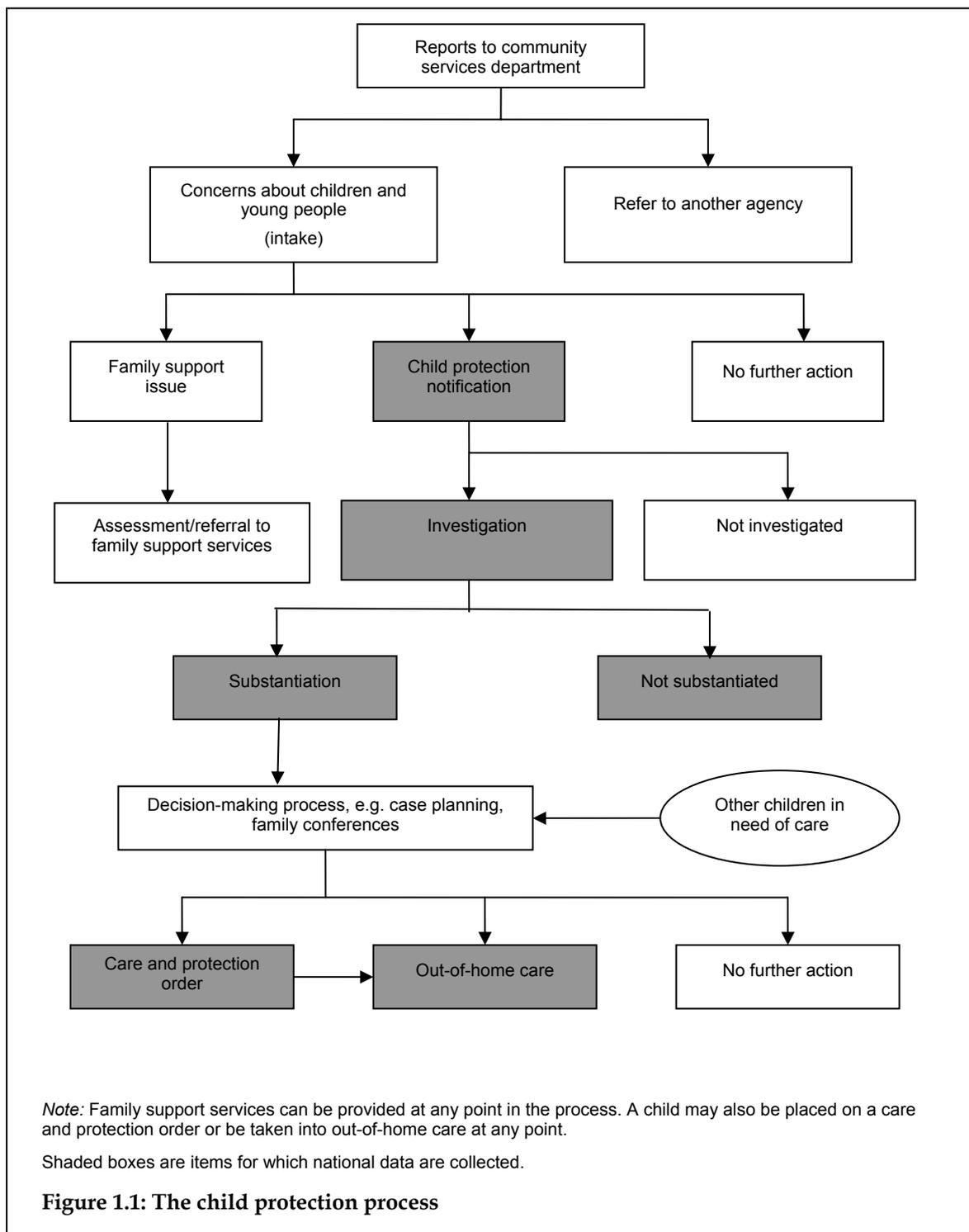
Children who are assessed to be in need of protection can come into contact with community services departments through a number of avenues. These include reports of concerns about a child made by someone in the community, by a professional mandated to report suspected abuse and neglect, or by an organisation that has contact with the family or child. The child, his or her parent(s), or another relative may also contact the department either to seek assistance or to report suspected child abuse or harm. These reports may relate to abuse and neglect or to broader family concerns such as economic problems or social isolation. There are no national data on the total number of reports made to community services departments relating to concerns about children.

Reports to the department are assessed to determine whether the matter should be dealt with by the community services department or referred to another agency. Those reports that are appropriate for the community service departments are further assessed to determine whether any further action is required.

Reports requiring further action are generally classified as either a family support issue or a child protection notification, although the way reports are classified varies somewhat across jurisdictions. Departmental officers, in deciding whether a report will be classified as a child protection notification, take a range of factors into account. Those reports classified as requiring family support are further assessed and may be referred to family support services. Child protection notifications are dealt with through a separate process.

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

A child protection notification is assessed by the department to determine whether it requires an investigation; whether it should be dealt with by other means, such as referral to other organisations or to family support services; or whether no further protective action is necessary or possible. An investigation is the process whereby the community services department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification, and the aim of an investigation is to make an assessment of the degree of harm or risk of harm for the child.



After an investigation has been finalised, a notification is classified as ‘substantiated’ or ‘not substantiated’. A notification will be substantiated where it is concluded after investigation that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. States and territories differ somewhat in what they actually substantiate. All jurisdictions substantiate situations where child abuse and neglect have occurred or are likely to occur, whereas some also substantiate situations where the child has been harmed or is at risk of harm and the parents have failed to act to protect the child.

Care and protection orders and out-of-home care

At any point in this process the community services department has the authority to apply to the relevant court to place the child on a care and protection order. Recourse to the court is usually a last resort and is used in situations where supervision and counselling are resisted by the family, where other avenues for the resolution of the situation have been exhausted, or where removal of a child from home into out-of-home care requires legal authorisation. In some jurisdictions, for example, all children who are placed in out-of-home care must be on an order of some kind.

Children can also be placed on a care and protection order and/or in out-of-home care for reasons other than child abuse and neglect; for example, in situations where family conflict is such that 'time out' is needed, or a child is a danger to himself or herself, or where the parents are deceased, ill or otherwise unable to care for the child.

Important differences among states and territories

There are some important differences between jurisdictions in policies and practices in relation to child protection, and these differences affect the data provided. The data from different jurisdictions are therefore not strictly comparable and should not be used to measure the performance of one jurisdiction relative to another.

One of the main differences between jurisdictions is in the policy frameworks used by states and territories in relation to notifications. In Western Australia, reports that express concerns about children are screened by senior staff. Also, a report expressing concern about children may receive the interim assessment classification of 'Child Concern Report' (CCR). This occurs when there is uncertainty at intake as to whether a child has experienced, or is likely to experience, significant maltreatment warranting a statutory child protection response. The CCR assessment provides the basis for the most appropriate response – statutory child protection (i.e. treat as if the contact is a notification), family support or no further action. A significant proportion of reports are therefore not counted as child protection notifications. The rates of children who are the subjects of notifications, and consequently substantiations, are therefore lower than the rates in other jurisdictions.

In Victoria, on the other hand, the definition of a 'notification' is very broad and includes some reports that may not be classified as a notification in other jurisdictions. Other states and territories have policies between these two extremes. For example, South Australia screens reports and may refer some of these to other agencies or provide family support services rather than a child protection response. In 2002, the Australian Capital Territory screened reports similar to South Australia, but in 2003 the definition was changed to incorporate all contacts regarding concerns for children as child protection reports. Tasmania previously had a very similar system to Western Australia, but since 2003–04 all reports to the department are recorded as a notification, which is a very similar system to Victoria. The screening process used in South Australia, however, does not appear to be as stringent as that used in Western Australia. In New South Wales, all reports classified as 'child protection' reports are categorised and receive a 'risk of harm' assessment to determine the appropriate action. Only reports of harm or risk of harm are included in this report.

Other differences between jurisdictions are also worth noting:

- In some jurisdictions, such as New South Wales, reports to the department relating to abuse by a stranger may be classified as a notification, but in other jurisdictions they are not.

- What is substantiated varies. Some jurisdictions substantiate the harm or risk of harm to the child, and others substantiate actions by parents or incidents that cause harm. In focusing on harm to the child, the focus of the child protection systems in many jurisdictions has shifted away from the actions of parents towards the outcomes for the child (see below).

Although there are differences between states and territories that affect the comparability of the data on children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care, the differences between jurisdictions are greatest in relation to child protection notifications, investigations and substantiations. National totals are therefore provided only for a small number of tables in this section.

Changes in child protection policies and practices

Child protection policies and practices are continually changing and evolving. Trends in child protection numbers should be interpreted carefully, as such changes in policies and practices impact on the numbers of children in the child protection systems in different ways. The broad changes in the child protection systems over the last decade are discussed below, followed by more detailed information on changes within states and territories over the last year. Specific definitions of children in need of care and protection for each jurisdiction are provided in Appendix 3.

Over the last decade it has been increasingly recognised that a large number of reports to child protection authorities are about situations in which parents are not coping with their parental responsibilities. The responses of child protection authorities have become less punitive and more focused on collaborating with and helping parents. As a result more resources have been directed towards family support services in many jurisdictions (AIHW 2001).

There has also been an increasing focus on early intervention services, which are seen to be effective in reducing the need for more intrusive child protection interventions at later stages. Cross-departmental strategies have been introduced in a number of jurisdictions, such as 'Families First' in New South Wales, 'Strengthening Families' in Victoria and 'Children First Framework' in Western Australia. These strategies attempt to assist families in a more holistic way, by coordinating service delivery and providing better access to different types of children's and family services.

The definition of what constitutes child abuse and neglect has changed and broadened over the last decade (Cashmore 2001). Naturally, any broadening of the definition of child abuse and neglect is likely to result in increasing notifications and substantiations. The focus of child protection in many jurisdictions (New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, for example) has shifted away from the identification and investigation of narrowly defined incidents of child abuse and neglect towards a broader assessment of whether a child or young person has suffered harm. This broader approach seeks to assess the child's protective needs.

In addition, many jurisdictions have introduced options for responding to the less serious reports through the provision of family support services, rather than through a formal investigation. These policies have been introduced at different times in different jurisdictions (for example in Western Australia in 1996), but in all cases they have led to substantial decreases in the numbers of investigations and substantiations.

Other significant changes include the introduction of structured risk assessment tools (for example in South Australia and the Northern Territory) to help workers identify children in

high-risk circumstances, to determine what services are necessary for the child and the family, and to document the basis for decisions and provide some consistency of response (Cashmore 2001). Centralised intake systems have also been introduced in some jurisdictions (New South Wales and South Australia) to increase the consistency of departmental responses.

More recently, community services departments have been concerned about rising rates of renotifications and resubstantiations. The Victorian Department of Human Services undertook detailed research and analysis of children in their child protection system (VDHS 2002). The study found that key underlying features, such as low income, substance abuse, mental health issues and the burdens of sole parenting, which led to some families coming into contact with child protection systems, were complex and chronic. The child protection system often did not effectively deal with these problems and many children were subject to renotifications and resubstantiations. The report noted that helping families to deal with these problems required more sustained and less intrusive support than the services usually provided by child protection authorities. It highlighted the need for strengthened prevention and early intervention services as well as improved service responses for children and young people with longer term involvement in the child protection system.

For children who are placed on care and protection orders, the current policy emphasis is on family preservation, or on keeping children in the family. A range of specialist family preservation services has been established in many 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. Victoria and South Australia in particular have established a number of these services, including those specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

There has been a push in some jurisdictions to seek greater permanency for children who are unable to live with their parents, through either adoption or long-term parenting orders. This follows moves made in both the United States and the United Kingdom where adoption is increasingly used as an avenue for permanency (Cashmore 2000). In 2001 New South Wales introduced legislation that allows for adoption as a placement option for children in the child protection system. This legislation also introduced a Sole Parental Responsibility Order that provides an intermediate legal status between fostering and adoption. A number of other jurisdictions have similar types of orders, including Victoria where the Permanent Care Order was introduced in 1992.

Family support services

As mentioned above, family support services are used by all jurisdictions in some capacity. They include services that seek to benefit families by improving their ability to care for children and to strengthen family relationships (AIHW 2001). These services are becoming increasingly recognised as an alternative to the more traditional forensic investigation. For example, where notifications to the departments do not involve child maltreatment, children and their families are being referred to family support services rather than being investigated. Also, in Western Australia, these cases are streamed into family support services instead of being recorded as a notification.

There is a broad range of these services across the jurisdictions. These include: information and referral, education/skill development counselling, mediation and therapy, residential and in-home support, and advocacy (AIHW 2001). Because of this breadth, the level of intensity of these services also varies. For the past few years, the National Child Protection and Support Services (NCPASS) data group has been endeavouring to develop the scope

and counting rules to enable data collection for the various levels of family support services. To date, NCPASS has focused on the 'intensive' end, which includes those services which aim to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers because of child protection concerns, and those services which aim to reunify families where separation has already occurred. At a minimum this service must provide at least 4 hours of support a week and last for up to 6 months.

At present, NCPASS is developing counting rules for the next level of services, which include child protection treatment and support services targeted to at-risk families where there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children. These services will include those that strengthen family relationships in response to concerns about the welfare of a child. Services may have either an early intervention orientation or support reunification.

Intensive family support services data

The AIHW has been collecting data on the intensive family support services (IFSS) since 1999–00. While most of these data are about the children who received the service, there is some limited information about the services. In 2003–04, there were 71 services reported to the AIHW. About half of these services were aimed at preventing the separation of the child from the family; the rest were aimed at both prevention of separation and reunification of the child into the family. Most of these services were located in capital cities or other major urban centres. However, those that were located in rural and remote locations catered predominantly for Indigenous children (unpublished data).

The age of the children who commenced an intensive family support service was broadly similar across the jurisdictions. The majority of the children were aged less than 10 years old, with most of these being under the age of 5 years (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Number of children aged 0–17 years in intensive family support services, by age at commencement of service, 2003–04

Age (years)	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA ^(a)	SA	Tas	ACT
	Number						
0–4	58	795	42	116	81	18	42
5–9	42	258	33	82	83	21	32
10–14	26	289	23	39	70	23	34
15–17	2	49	1	5	7	1	5
Unknown	—	1	—	54	9	—	3
Total	128	1,392	99	296	250	63	116
	Per cent						
0–4	45	57	42	48	34	29	37
5–9	33	19	33	34	34	33	28
10–14	20	21	23	16	29	37	30
15–17	2	4	1	2	3	2	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

(a) In Western Australia, not all services are able to report on the age of the child when the child is over 12 years. These children are included in the 'unknown' category. Therefore the percentages should be interpreted carefully as it cannot be assumed that the 'unknowns' are evenly distributed among the age categories.

Note: The Northern Territory was unable to provide these data.

Table 1.2: Children in intensive family support services, by living arrangements at commencement of service, by selected states and territories, 2003–04

Living situation	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	Tas	ACT
Number						
Family care						
child living with parent(s)	104	1,122	58	150	60	91
child living with other relatives/kin	3	4	—	17	1	9
Child in out-of-home care	12	79	39	75	2	12
Child in shared care	—	1	2	—	—	4
Other	9	4	—	—	—	—
Not available	—	182	—	54	—	—
Total	128	1,392	99	296	63	116
Per cent						
Family care						
child living with parent(s)	81	93	59	62	95	78
child living with other relatives/kin	2	—	—	7	2	8
Child in out-of-home care	9	7	39	31	3	10
Child in shared care	—	—	2	—	—	3
Other	7	—	—	—	—	—
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: South Australia and the Northern Territory were unable to provide these data.

In Victoria and Tasmania, almost all of the children who received a service were living with their parents. On the other hand, in Queensland and Western Australia, a large proportion of children receiving intensive family support were living in out-of-home care (Table 1.2). This may indicate a stronger emphasis on reunification by the services in these jurisdictions, as opposed to prevention in the other jurisdictions.

Recent policy changes

The following paragraphs, provided by the various authorities in the states and territories, outline the major child protection policy changes that occurred in 2003–04. Legislation relating to specific jurisdictions is listed in Appendix 3.

New South Wales

In 2003–04, the roll-out of the enhanced funding package for the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) commenced with the appointment of more than 150 additional child protection caseworkers during the year. The increased focus by DoCS on prevention and early intervention activity was reflected in additional funding for projects to consolidate and expand the service network supporting families participating in the Early Intervention Program. The program is consistent with research that demonstrates the efficacy of intervening early in the life of a child, and early in the onset of family difficulties; projects include family support, centre-based child care, supported playgroups, parenting programs, home visiting and one-stop shop family centres, specialist family support services with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) family workers, Aboriginal playgroups and young parent groups.

Implementation of the 3-stage proclamation plan for the commencement of key out-of-home care provisions of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* was successfully completed in 2003–04 with the third and final stage occurring in March 2004. DoCS continues its program of research, development and design of improved models of care and support services to better address the needs of out-of-home care children and young people; enhancements include assessment and screening tools for children and young people with high and complex needs, professional foster care services, intensive case management, and relative and kinship care services. Additional funds were allocated this year to expand services by Aboriginal service-providers for Aboriginal children and young people.

Victoria

The Victorian Government has embarked on a reform process including a review of the *Children and Young Person's Act 1989*. A series of reports were commissioned on the Victorian Child Protection and Placement system, which will contribute to the review. In September 2004 the government released a final discussion paper, *Protecting Children: Ten Priorities for Children's Wellbeing and Safety*, which provided a framework for translating the reform directions proposed in these reports into system, policy, practice and legislative change. Key priorities include a focus on earlier and more coordinated service responses for vulnerable children and families, a stronger focus on children and young people's stability and developmental needs, strengthening Aboriginal self-management to improve the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal children, and more flexible, solution-focused protective interventions. Consultations on the proposals contained in the discussion paper are now concluding, with new legislation planned in 2005.

To support the overall reform directions, funding was provided over 4 years to strengthen child protection and family support services. The budget allocation built on the success of the Family Support Innovation Projects that commenced in 2002–03 and introduced a number of targeted strategies to address areas of particular concern, including 15 Family Support Innovation Projects, a new adolescent mediation and diversion service, new Aboriginal family decision-making and family violence services, and additional funds to carers to meet the educational and health needs of children and young people placed in their care by the state.

Queensland

In March 2004, the Queensland Government committed to the reform of the state's child protection system. This was in response to the recommendations of the January 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission Report, *Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care* and the December 2003 *Audit of Foster Carers Subject to Child Protection Notifications*.

The primary recommendation of the Crime and Misconduct Commission was for the creation of a system that reflected a whole-of-government approach to child protection. A central component of the new child protection system was the establishment of the Department of Child Safety to focus exclusively on child protection and to act as lead agency in facilitating a whole-of-government response to child protection.

The Department of Child Safety was officially launched on 24 September 2004. The department will focus exclusively on child protection and will progress the reform agenda by implementing a number of initiatives including: training and support for foster carers; strategies to improve services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families; partnerships with non-government agencies; improved external and internal

accountabilities within the Department of Child Safety and the broader child protection system; and sound systemic support for front-line service delivery.

Western Australia

The Children and Community Services Bill 2003 represents a milestone for the wellbeing of children, families and communities. It reflects current research evidence and contemporary practice and gives clear direction for a model of best practice, with an emphasis on supporting family wellbeing and the capacity of families to care safely for their children.

A shared responsibility, multi-agency approach to child protection has been promoted and strengthened through the development of the Interagency Collaborative Framework for Protecting Children. Through the framework, relevant government and community agencies commit to working collaboratively to achieve the protection of children. This Framework is supported by agreed Reciprocal Child Protection Reporting Procedures.

Protocols have been developed with the Disability Services Commission (DSC) on joint responsibilities for wards who have disabilities and the provision of respite care services. Work is proceeding on protocols for provision of services for parents who have disabilities and for the provision of support for families where the child is at risk of coming into care.

An Extended Family Care Framework has been developed to promote the active support of relative carers within the context of the department's broader statutory responsibilities for promoting and building the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, their families and communities.

Five non-government placement services have been funded to also provide reunification services for children and young people who have been placed with them.

To ensure that the needs of children abused in care are met and their legal rights protected, a Duty of Care Unit has been established within the Department for Community Development. Its role is to work with officers of the department to support appropriate response to allegations of abuse in care and to review and audit all reported allegations of abuse of children in departmental care since 1993. A strategy to prevent abuse in care is being implemented that includes a central register of government and non-government carers to ensure carers are appropriately screened, assessed and registered, and mandatory training for all government and non-government carers.

South Australia

Since the Layton Child Protection Review was tabled in Parliament in March 2003, the South Australian Government has been working to progress not only the recommendations of the child protection review but also the recommendations of the Semple Review of Alternative Care and the findings of the Family and Youth Services Workload Analysis Project.

In 2003-04 the government has:

- recognised the special needs of children under the Guardianship of the Minister;
- increased staffing levels in Children, Youth and Family Services;
- expanded family reunification services;
- created two assessment stabilisation and transition services for vulnerable young people
- established a new home-based care service for children and young people with disabilities;
- established three regional Aboriginal Family Care Committees;
- given all children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister priority access to all government services;

- assisted the release of children from immigration detention by providing support for them to live in the community;
- negotiated with the Commonwealth Government to establish a housing project in Port Augusta for mothers and children formerly residing in Baxter Detention Centre;
- completed a review of Aboriginal children who are in non-Aboriginal foster care placement and developed cultural maintenance plans for Aboriginal children and young people in foster care;
- worked with the Family Court of Australia in Project Magellan to speed resolution of contact and residence disputes where there are serious allegations of child abuse;
- held a state-wide “Shared Learning and Development Forum” for foster carers, government and non-government service providers, and community agencies including CREATE foundation; and
- established a Special Investigations Unit to ensure allegations of abuse in care are investigated independently and children under the care and/or Guardianship of the Minister are properly protected.

Tasmania

On 1 July 2003, the Department of Health and Human Services changed its method of reporting to include all notifications to care and protection services. Prior to this date, notifications of ‘child harm and maltreatment’ were counted but notifications classified as ‘child and family concern’ were not. As a consequence of the change in reporting, the number of notifications recorded in 2003–04 is significantly higher than in previous years.

The department has also introduced new rates of reimbursement for carers. The rates reflect the cost of caring for a child in Tasmania who is not in care, and recognise the additional needs of children on care and protection orders.

Other developments in out-of-home care include the introduction of Looking After Children, the development of a kinship care program, and policies and guidelines that address the needs of children and young people who leave care.

At a broader level, the department has established the Our Kids Bureau. Its aim is to develop policies, programs and services in collaboration with government and community organisations that improve the health and wellbeing of children in Tasmania.

Australian Capital Territory

In May 2004, the ACT Commissioner for Public Administration released her report, *The Territory as Parent*, which reviewed the safety of children in care. In response to that report, the government created the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. The government’s aim in revising the structural arrangements and increasing resources was to improve practice and reporting standards.

The jurisdiction has had difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff due to the recruitment campaigns being conducted in other states. To counteract this problem, extensive recruitment campaigns were conducted locally, nationally and internationally.

Consistent with national trends, there continues to be significant growth in child protection reports in the Australian Capital Territory. In order to meet this growth, a single child protection contact point for the public was established. This was accompanied by the introduction of a revised risk assessment framework and a revised procedures manual.

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Government increased the Family and Children's Services' budget in December 2003 with a view to improving child protection services and systems over the next 5 years. Part of the increased funds has been used to employ new child protection staff, to increase foster carer rates, and to ensure quality care for children in care through a partnership project with CREATE. Another initiative resulted in the employment of additional Indigenous apprentices and cadets, providing tailored services to some of the highest need children in care and their carers.

In 2005 there are plans for a new Intensive Family Support Service in Darwin and the development of a number of remote community child and family projects in partnership with the Commonwealth, Aboriginal organisations and local government.

The child protection data

The data in this report were extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory community services departments according to definitions and counting rules agreed to by the departments and the AIHW. The state and territory community services departments provide funding to the AIHW to collate, analyse and publish these data annually. The NCPASS data group has responsibility for overseeing the national child protection data and includes representatives from each state and territory and from the AIHW.

There are significant links and overlaps between the three data collections included in this report. For example, children who are the subjects of substantiations may be placed on care and protection orders, and many children on care and protection orders are also in out-of-home care. There are, however, only very limited data at the national level on the movement of children through the child protection system and the overlap between the three separate data collections.

There are also significant gaps in the national data on child protection. Apart from the intensive family support services data, there are no other data at the national level on the support services used by children in need of protection and their families.

Work is currently being undertaken by NCPASS to broaden the scope of the national data collection and to improve comparability. A new national framework has been developed to count responses to calls received by community services departments in relation to the safety and wellbeing of children, including responses that occur outside the formal child protection system. Data elements such as the provision of advice and information, and assessment of needs, as well as general and intensive family support services, are incorporated into the new framework. It is proposed that national reporting will be aligned to this framework over the next few years.

The method of collecting the national child protection data is also in the process of changing. Currently the data are provided to the AIHW in aggregate form on Excel spreadsheets. In the next few years, it will instead be provided in unit record format. This has been agreed to by each jurisdiction. The development of the data dictionaries to support this collection, based on the new reporting framework, is currently in progress and will be pilot tested over the next 18 months. A feasibility study is commencing in early 2005.

The practices used to identify and record the Indigenous status of children in the child protection system vary across states and territories. Over the last few years, several jurisdictions have introduced measures to improve the identification of Indigenous clients.

In some jurisdictions, however, there is a significant proportion of children whose Indigenous status is unknown and this affects the quality of the data on Indigenous status. Consequently, the data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be interpreted with care.