



Child protection Australia 2020-21

Web report | Last updated: 15 Jun 2022 | Topic: [Child protection](#) |

Citation

AIHW

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) [Child protection Australia 2020-21](#), AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 31 May 2022.

[Latest edition](#)

Last updated 31/05/2022 v7.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 [CC BY](#)



About

During 2020-21, more than 178,800 Australian children received child protection services. Of these children, 68% (around 120,800) were the subject of an investigation of a notification of abuse or neglect and about 49,700 children were the subjects of substantiations in 2020-21. At 30 June 2021, more than 46,200 children were in out-of-home care with 91% being in a home-based care placement.

Cat. no: CWS 87

- [Data](#)
- [Technical notes](#)
- [Glossary](#)

Findings from this report:

- Indigenous children on care and protection orders at 30 June increased from about 19,700 in 2017 to about 24,200 in 2021
 - 63% of Indigenous children in out-of-home care were living with relatives/kin or other Indigenous caregivers
 - Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, the rate of children subject to notifications increased from 43 to 52 per 1,000
 - Of the approximately 5,400 children reunified, nearly 1 in 3 (31%) were Indigenous children
-

Last updated 28/04/2022 v19.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Summary

This report presents statistics on state and territory child protection and family support services, as well as selected characteristics of children receiving these services. This includes statistics for 2020-21, and trends over the 5-year period from 2016-17 to 2020-21.

Each year, around 3.2% of all children aged less than 18 years are assisted by Australia's child protection systems. Children and their families may receive support services to keep children with their families, or be subject to investigations of reports of child abuse/neglect, protection orders, and/or placement in out-of-home care. Some children are unable to live safely at home as they may be at risk of being abused or neglected, or their parents may be unable to provide adequate care.

Australia's child protection system provided services to 1 in 32 children aged less than 18 years in 2020-21

State and territory child protection services supported more than 178,800 children in 2020-21. This has increased from about 168,300 in 2016-17. Services range from initial investigations of child abuse or neglect through to care and protection orders, and/or placement in out-of-home care.

Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, notifications increased by 40% (around 379,500 in 2016-17 to nearly 531,900 in 2020-21) while substantiations increased by only 7.2% (around 68,000 to nearly 72,900). In 2020-21, approximately 293,600 children were the subject of nearly 531,900 notifications and about 49,700 children were subjects of approximately 72,900 substantiations of abuse and/or neglect. Of all children who were subjects of substantiations, 79% had one substantiation, 12% had 2, and 5.4% had 4 or more substantiations of abuse and/or neglect.

1 in 114 children aged less than 18 years were subject to substantiated abuse or neglect

Nearly 49,700 children were subject to substantiated abuse or neglect. Emotional abuse (55%) was the most common primary type of abuse or neglect substantiated through investigations in 2020-21. This was followed by neglect (21%), physical abuse (14%), and sexual abuse (10%). A higher proportion of girls (14%) were subject to sexual abuse than boys (5.8%), while boys had slightly higher proportions of substantiations for neglect and physical abuse.

More than 46,200 children were in out-of-home care

At 30 June 2021, more than 46,200 children in out-of-home care, a 7.3% increase from 30 June 2017 when the number of children was approximately 43,100. At 30 June 2021, 91% were in a home-based care placement and 68% had been continuously in out-of-home care for 2 years or more.

1 in 23 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were subject to substantiated abuse or neglect

The number of Indigenous children who were the subject of a substantiation has increased by 6.2% between 2016-17 and 2020-21 (from about 13,700 to about 14,600). The most common type of substantiated abuse for Indigenous children was emotional abuse (48%) followed by neglect (31%).

At 30 June 2021, approximately 24,200 Indigenous children were on care and protection orders. Of these children, 69% (around 16,700) were on guardianship or custody orders.

1 in 17 Indigenous children (around 19,500) were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021, almost two-thirds (63%) of whom were living with relatives, kin or other Indigenous caregivers.

Of the approximately 5,400 children reunified in 2020-21, nearly 1 in 3 (31%) were Indigenous children.



Understanding child protection

Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices against children (UNICEF 2021). When children cannot live safely at home, child protection systems prioritise children's physical, mental, and psychosocial needs to safeguard their lives and futures (UNICEF 2021). Child protection functions to protect the fundamental rights of children which include safety, freedom from violence and a stable family environment (UN General Assembly 1989).

Child protection services aim to protect children from abuse and neglect in family settings. The World Health Organization (WHO 2020) defines child maltreatment (child abuse and neglect) as:

Abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Explore understanding child protection:

- [How does child protection work in Australia?](#)
- [National child protection data](#)

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 26/05/2022 v23.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 CC BY



Understanding child protection

How does child protection work in Australia?

In Australia, state and territory governments are responsible for statutory child protection. Each responsible department assists vulnerable children who have been, or are at risk of being, abused, neglected, or otherwise harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

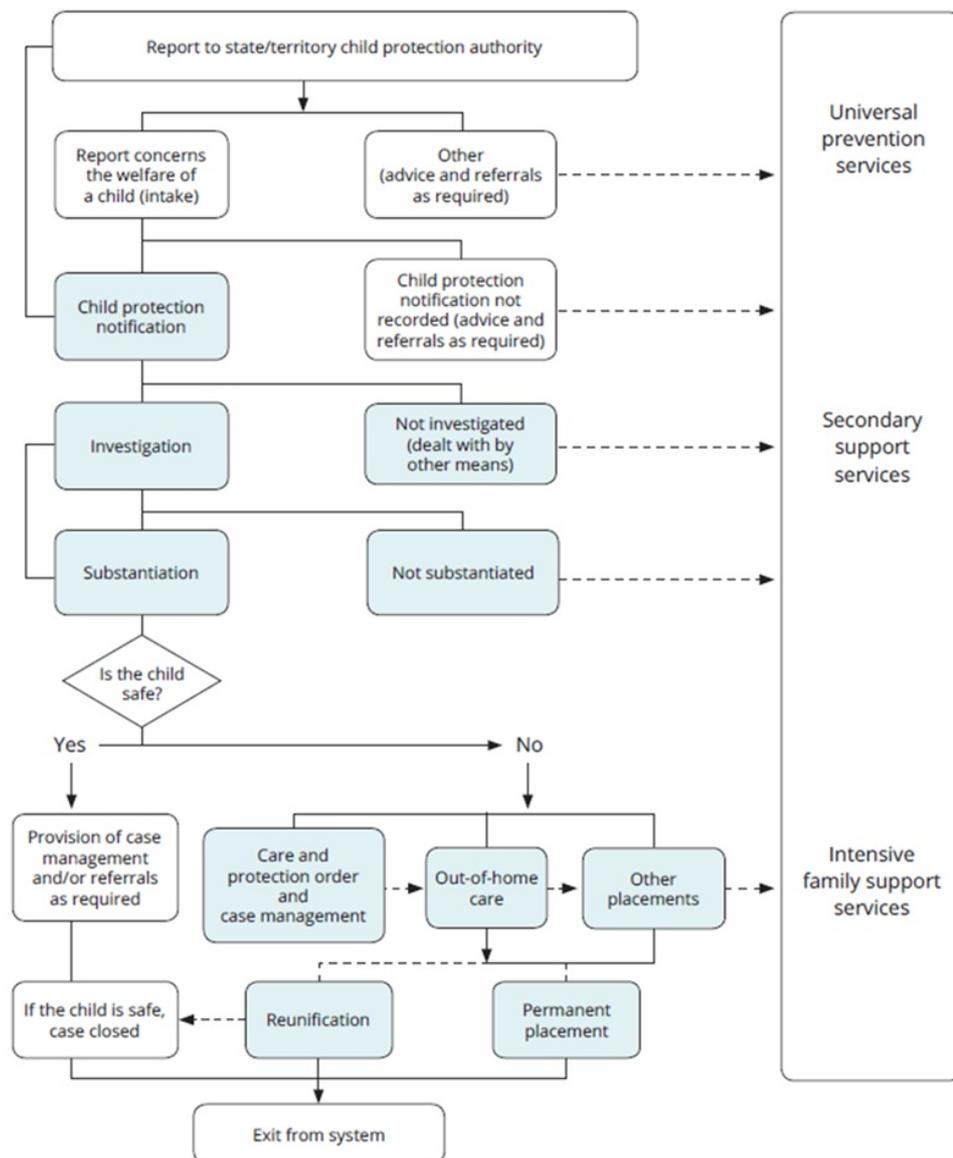
Children and their families come into contact with the child protection system during the investigation and case management of child harm reports. This process may lead to legal intervention to remove a child, or referral to a variety of support services.

Several government and non-government organisations share a common duty of care towards the protection of children and young people. Child protection agencies investigate, process, and oversee the management of child protection cases. Children and their families are assisted by being provided with, or referred to, a wide variety of services, generally delivered by non-government organisations who provide family support services.

The national recurrent spending on child protection and out-of-home care was \$6.2 billion in 2020-21, a real increase of \$285 million (4.8%) on 2019-20. This continues a pattern of increased spending over the past 5-year periods, averaging an annual increase of about \$385 million between 2015-16 and 2020-21 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2022).

State and territory departments and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) jointly fund the annual collation, analysis and publication of child protection data. While there are differences in legislation, policy and practice between jurisdictions that can affect the comparability of some data (see [Appendix A](#)), the AIHW works with states and territories to have data supplied according to a set of agreed technical specifications which reflects similar processes. A simplified version of these processes and the data supplied by states and territories is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Child protection processes in Australia



Notes:

1. Shaded boxes are items for which data are collected nationally.
2. Dashed lines indicate that clients might or might not receive these services, depending on need, service availability, and client willingness to participate in what are voluntary services.
3. Support services referred to in the box on the right include family preservation and reunification services provided by government departments responsible for child protection, and other agencies. Children and families move in and out of these services and the statutory child protection system, and might also be in the statutory child protection system while receiving support services.

Children can come into contact with the child protection system in various ways. Anyone concerned about a child’s welfare can report their concern to a responsible department for further action. Reports of concern can be made by community members, professionals (for example, police, school personnel, or health practitioners), the children themselves, their parent(s), or another relative. These reports might relate to abuse and neglect, or to family concerns such as economic problems or social isolation.

Reports of concern are screened to determine whether the situation meets a threshold for further action. The defined threshold for further action varies across jurisdictions, and this can lead to jurisdictional differences in the responses to initial reports. Reports deemed serious enough to require further action are classified as a ‘family support issue’ and referred to support services, or as a ‘child protection notification’ requiring further intervention. National child protection data do not include reports that are not classified as ‘child protection notifications’.

Nationally, the focus of services is increasingly on early intervention and family support services to help prevent families entering or re-entering the child protection system, and to minimise the need for more intrusive interventions (AIHW 2021; Bromfield & Holzer 2008; Commonwealth of Australia 2021). Most jurisdictions have enacted strategies that help families in a more holistic way, by coordinating service delivery and providing better access to different types of child and family services (Commonwealth of Australia 2021).

Child protection policies and practices are continually being developed by jurisdictions to improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children. While the processes are largely similar, there are key differences that should be considered when comparing data across jurisdictions.

Further details about the national policy context and each jurisdiction's policy and practice are described in [Appendixes A to C](#).

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 22/04/2022 v17.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Understanding child protection

National child protection data

Data in this report were largely drawn from the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS), implemented for reporting from 2012-13. Children in scope for this data set are those aged less than 18 years and for some states and territories this also includes unborn children. Further details about the CP NMDS are available in [Appendix A](#).

National child protection data are based on cases reported to departments responsible for child protection so may understate the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect. Notifications made to other organisations, such as the police or non-government welfare agencies, are included only if these notifications were also referred to departments responsible for child protection.

For child-based counts in this report, children were counted only once in the relevant table, regardless of the number of contacts the child had with the component of child protection being reported. For example, if a child was the subject of more than one substantiation during the reporting period, they are counted only once in tables reporting the number of children in substantiations. As it is possible for children to receive child protection services in multiple jurisdictions, some children may be double-counted where data from multiple jurisdictions are reported.

Throughout the report, table and figure titles refer to 'children' where counts of unique children are used. Where events are the counted unit the specific component of the child protection system is referred to in table and figure titles (for example, notifications or orders issued). See [Technical notes](#) for more information on counting methodology.

Rates presented in this report are per 1,000 population of children. That is, population rates are calculated by dividing the number of children for a specific measure or group (for example, children in out-of-home care) by the corresponding population. See [Technical notes](#) for more information.

Metadata for the CP NMDS are available on [METeOR](#), the AIHW's online metadata repository. A [data quality statement](#) for the CP NMDS is also available.

Box 1.2 summarises data limitations specific to this report.

Box 1.2: Data limitations in this report

Trends in *Child Protection Australia* reports are for 5-year periods unless specified otherwise. Changes in state and territory legislation, policy/practice, and information management systems, can reduce the ability to accurately compare data over longer periods.

Increases over time in the number or rate of children receiving child protection services or support might relate to changes in the underlying rate of child abuse and neglect, increases in notifications and access to services, or a combination of factors.

A nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care was implemented for all jurisdictions in 2018-19 (see [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#) for more details) and the out-of-home care time series analyses in this report have been back cast with the national definition to 2016-17. Data presented in this report should not be directly compared with data published in *Child protection Australia* reports prior to 2018-19.

Data produced from the CP NMDS based on nationally agreed specifications might not match state and territory figures published elsewhere, and might not be comparable with data for previous years.

There are also differences in jurisdictional policy and practice which can influence other reported data. See [Appendixes A to C](#) for further information. The differences can affect comparability of data across jurisdictions for some measures, as noted in figure and table footnotes.

Jurisdiction-specific data issues

New South Wales implemented a new client management system in 2017-18 and in 2020-21 data continue to be unavailable for households exiting foster care and households exiting relative/kinship care (see [Carers](#)).

Impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Measures put in place as part of government responses to COVID-19 during 2020 and 2021 (including travel bans/restrictions, lockdowns limiting non-urgent face-to-face work and remote learning for students and quarantine requirements) may have affected child protection processes during 2019-20 and 2020-21. The long-term impact of COVID-19 on child protection processes is still unknown. No specific impacts on the annual data are highlighted in this report, however effects may become apparent in future years.

Some potential impacts of COVID-19 on children in child protection in Australia are explored in the AIHW report, [Child protection in the time of COVID-19](#). The report presents monthly child protection data from March 2020 to September 2020 with comparisons to 2019. It contains selected information on risk factors for child abuse, including income and housing stress, parental mental health, substance use, and domestic violence.

For information on the impact of COVID-19 on population data, see Box 9.1 in the [Technical notes](#).

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 11/05/2022 v19.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Children receiving child protection services

Key findings

- In 2020-21, about 178,800 children (1 in 32) received child protection services such as investigations of notified child abuse/neglect, care and protection orders, or out-of-home care placements.
- 58% of these children (103,400) were the subject of an investigation only and 24% (42,000) were on a care and protection order and in out-of-home care.
- 65% of children (116,600) receiving services were repeat clients.
- About 58,000 (172 per 1,000) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children received child protection services in 2020-21.

Child protection authorities provide multiple services to vulnerable children, such as case management, referral to support services, investigations of notified child abuse/neglect, provision of care and protection orders and out-of-home care placements. A summary of child protection services reported in *Child protection Australia* is presented in Table 2.1.

A child may receive one or more of these services depending on their circumstances.

Table 2.1: Services for vulnerable children

Service	When does a child receive this service?	What's involved?
Investigation	Children become the subject of an investigation when a child protection department receives a notification of child maltreatment that meets a threshold for further action.	Child protection workers look into an allegation of child maltreatment. This includes a range of information gathering activities such as interviews, record checks and home visits.
Care and protection order	Orders are granted for children who have been found to be the victims of child abuse/neglect or are in need of protection. In most cases this occurs following a substantiation; however, orders can be made to remove children from unsafe environments immediately.	An order conferring legal responsibility for a child is made through the courts. This has the effect of transferring parental responsibility for the child to the child protection department, or an authorised Aboriginal community controlled organisation, or a nominated carer, or initiating supervision of parents.
Out-of-home care	Out-of-home care placements are provided to children who are unable to live at home. This may be for child protection reasons or to provide respite for parents.	A child is placed in alternative accommodation as they are unable to live at home. The type of placement is dependent upon each child's circumstances.
Intensive family support service	Families can be referred to intensive family support services at any time. Child protection departments may utilise these services in less severe cases and to help facilitate reunification of families.	Families are referred to these services for advice, education and support. The aim is to prevent separation of children from parents and to achieve reunification where possible.

In this report, children receiving child protection services are those children aged less than 18 years who in 2020-21 were:

- the subject of an investigation of a notification
- on a care and protection order
- in out-of-home care.

Box 2.1 outlines data limitations for reporting on children receiving child protection services.

Children may be involved in more than one component of the child protection system. As such, 'Children receiving child protection services' is not a total count of the 3 areas; it is a count of unique children across the 3 areas (see Figure 2.2 for the overlap of services received).

Children who were only the subject of a notification that was not subsequently investigated have not been included. This is because, apart from an initial risk assessment, it is expected that the department responsible for child protection would have a limited level of involvement with these children and their families.

Children who received only intensive family support services have also not been included in this section as unit record-level data were not available for national reporting. See [Intensive Family Support Services](#) for information about children receiving intensive family support services.

Box 2.1: Data limitations for children receiving child protection services

There are differences in jurisdictional legislation, policy and practice regarding the administration of child protection services. Refer to Boxes 3.1, 4.1 and 5.2 for further information, as well as to table footnotes, the [Technical notes](#), and [Appendixes A to C](#) before comparing data across jurisdictions.

Explore children receiving child protection services:

- [How many children received child protection services?](#)
 - [How many children were new or repeat clients?](#)
 - [How old were children receiving child protection services?](#)
 - [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system](#)
 - [Has the provision of child protection services changed over time?](#)
-

Last updated 26/05/2022 v33.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Children receiving child protection services

How many children received child protection services?

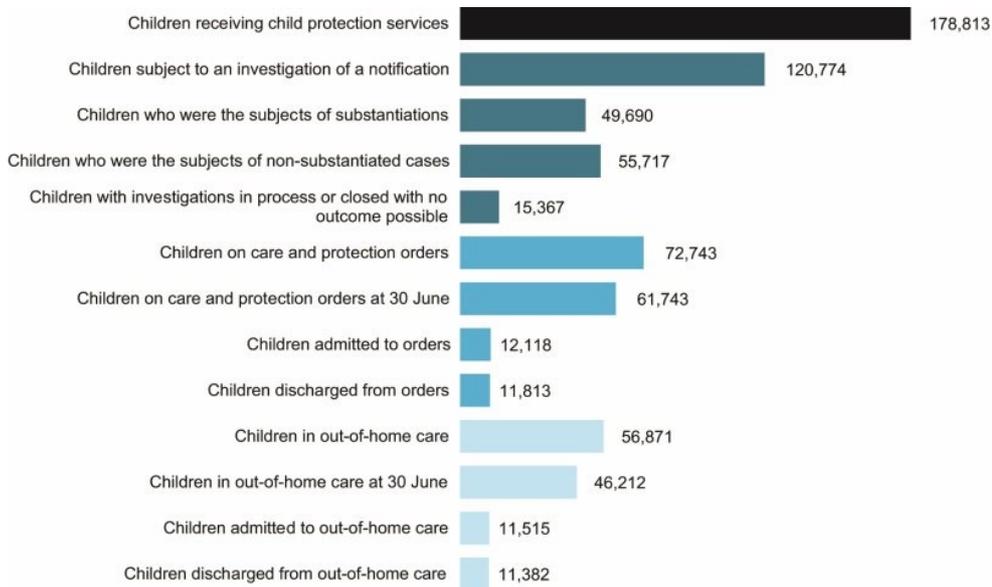
In 2020-21, about 178,800 children received child protection services (Figure 2.1), a rate of 32 per 1,000 children aged less than 18 years.

Of children receiving child protection services in 2020-21:

- 120,800 were the subject of an investigation (21 per 1,000)
- 72,700 were on a care and protection order (13 per 1,000)
- 56,900 were in out-of-home care (10 per 1,000).

The services provided to children depend upon their individual circumstances. Following investigation, some cases of child abuse/neglect may require subsequent interventions, such as a care and protection order and/or out-of-home care placement. In other cases, an investigation may determine a child is safe at home and not require any further intervention.

Figure 2.1: Children receiving child protection services, 2020-21 (number)



Notes:

1. Children might be involved in more than one component of the system. As such, the components do not sum to the total children receiving child protection services.
2. Children might be the subject of multiple investigations and decisions to substantiate or not substantiate within the reporting period. But the numbers reported for 'children who were the subjects of substantiations' and 'children who were the subjects of non-substantiated cases' are mutually exclusive - children can be counted only for the highest level of intervention provided in the period (that is, substantiation or not a substantiation).
3. Refer to the [Glossary](#) for definitions.

Chart: AIHW.

Sources: Tables 2.2, 4.2 and supplementary data tables S3.3, S5.1, S5.2, and T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Table 2.2: Children receiving child protection services, by state or territory, 2020-21

State or territory	Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification (number)	Children on care and protection orders (number)	Children in out-of-home care (number)	Children receiving child protection services (number)	Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification (number per 1,000)	Children on care and protection orders (number per 1,000)	Children in out-of-home care (number per 1,000)	Children receiving child protection services (number per 1,000)
NSW	42,056	23,133	18,392	58,473	23.5	13.0	10.3	32.7
Vic	30,026	19,172	12,809	45,552	21.1	13.4	9.0	31.9

Qld	23,583	14,260	11,716	36,060	19.8	12.0	9.8	30.3
WA	11,777	6,894	5,683	17,691	19.2	11.3	9.3	28.9
SA	4,959	5,354	4,937	9,347	13.4	14.5	13.4	25.3
Tas	755	1,634	1,262	2,247	6.7	14.6	11.3	20.0
ACT	1,738	1,029	830	2,595	18.0	10.7	8.6	26.9
NT	5,880	1,267	1,242	6,848	95.5	20.6	20.2	111.3
Total	120,774	72,743	56,871	178,813	21.4	12.9	10.1	31.6

Notes:

1. The number of children who were the subject of an investigation is not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. 'Children receiving child protection services' is defined as one or more of the following occurring within the reporting period: being subject to an investigation of a notification, being on a care and protection order, or being in out-of-home care. It is not a total count of these 3 areas; it is a count of unique children across the 3 areas.
3. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates. For jurisdiction-specific footnotes, see Table 2.2 in the [Child protection Australia 2020-21 data tables](#).

Sources: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21; Table P1.

As children may receive a combination of child protection services, there are links and overlaps between:

- notifications, investigations, and substantiations
- care and protection orders
- out-of-home care.

In 2020-21, 58% of 178,800 children receiving child protection services were the subject of an investigation only, and nearly one-quarter (24%) of children were both on an order and in out-of-home care (Figure 2.2). Overall, 6.8% of children were involved in all 3 components of the system.

The degree of overlap across the system components varied little between 2018-19 and 2020-21 (AIHW 2019, 2020, 2021).

Figure 2.2: Children receiving child protection services, by component of services received, 2020-21 (per cent)

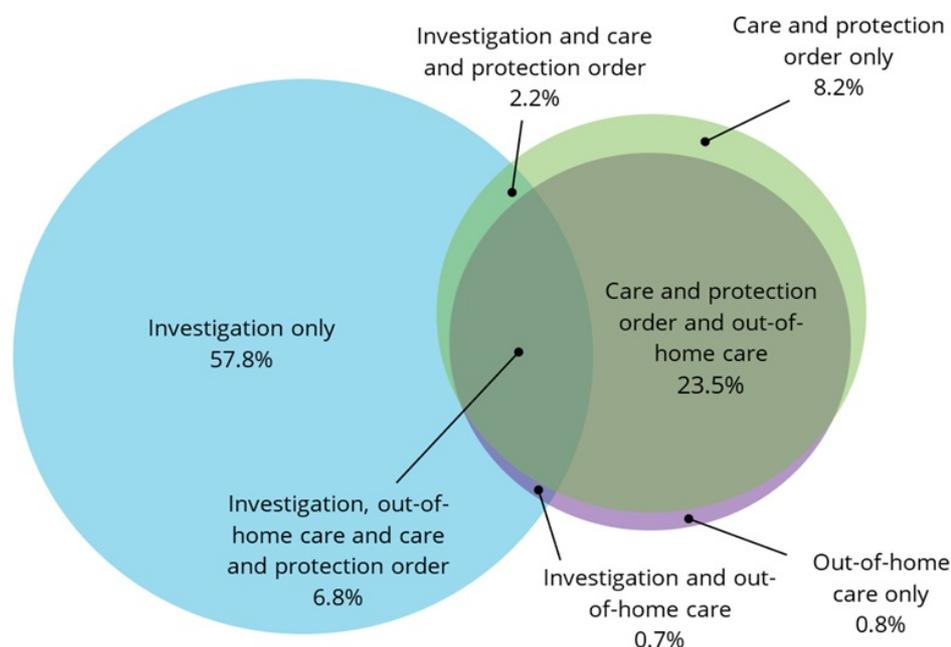


Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S2.1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Children receiving child protection services who were the subject of an investigation only represented a large proportion of the activity in the child protection system. Maltreatment was not substantiated for 58% of these children (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Children who were the subject of a finalised investigation only, by investigation outcome and state or territory, 2020-21

State or territory	Substantiated (number)	Not substantiated (number)	Total children in finalised investigations (number)	Substantiated (per cent)	Not substantiated (per cent)	Total children in finalised investigations (per cent)
NSW	14,780	15,089	29,869	49.5	50.5	100.0
Vic	11,470	12,818	24,288	47.2	52.8	100.0
Qld	4,440	13,512	17,952	24.7	75.3	100.0
WA	3,537	4,238	7,775	45.5	54.5	100.0
SA	1,697	1,957	3,654	46.4	53.6	100.0
Tas	286	88	374	76.5	23.5	100.0
ACT	229	1,252	1,481	15.5	84.5	100.0
NT	1,439	3,068	4,507	31.9	68.1	100.0
Total	37,878	52,022	89,900	42.1	57.9	100.0

Notes:

1. The data presented in this table are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. This table includes data for children whose only contact with child protection services during 2020-21 was an investigation. It excludes those who had an investigation *and* involvement in another area of the system, such as care and protection orders and/or out-of-home care. The data about investigation outcomes are further restricted to include only those for whom an investigation was finalised in the reporting period, therefore excluding investigations in process, or closed with no outcome possible. Data for all children were the subject of substantiations are available in Supplementary data table S3.3.
3. For jurisdiction-specific footnotes, see Table 2.3 in the [Child protection Australia 2020-21 data tables](#).

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 26/05/2022 v61.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Children receiving child protection services

How many children were new or repeat clients?

New clients are children or young people who have never previously been the subject of an investigation, any type of national care and protection order, or funded out-of-home care placement (excluding respite placements lasting less than 7 days) within the jurisdiction.

Repeat clients are children or young people who have previously been the subject of an investigation; or were discharged (according to national specifications) from any type of national care and protection order or funded out-of-home care placement (excluding respite placements lasting less than 7 days); or whose earliest order and/or placement in the current reporting period is part of a preceding continuous episode of care.

Data on new and repeat clients to child protection services provide some insight into the extent to which new children, or those with prior involvement, come into contact with the system, and whether this differs across the system components.

About two-thirds (65%) of children receiving child protection services in 2020-21 had been in contact with the system before (Figure 2.3). However, the proportion of repeat clients was substantially higher for children on a care and protection order (94%) or in out-of-home care (93%) than for those who were the subject of investigations during the year (49%).

Figure 2.3: New and repeat clients receiving child protection services, by service type, 2020-21 (per cent)

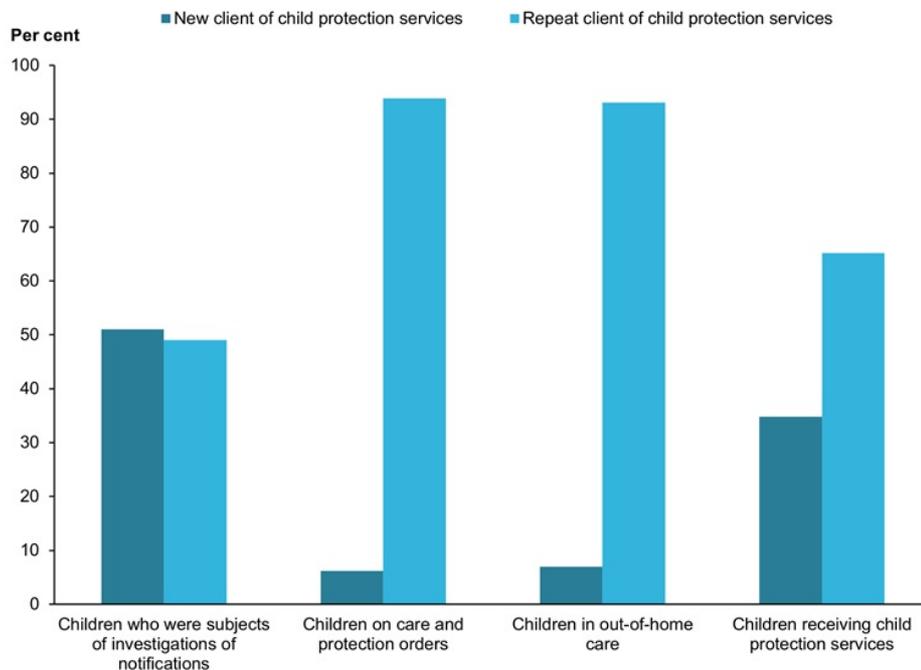


Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data tables S2.2, AIHW Child Protection

Last updated 13/04/2022 v6.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

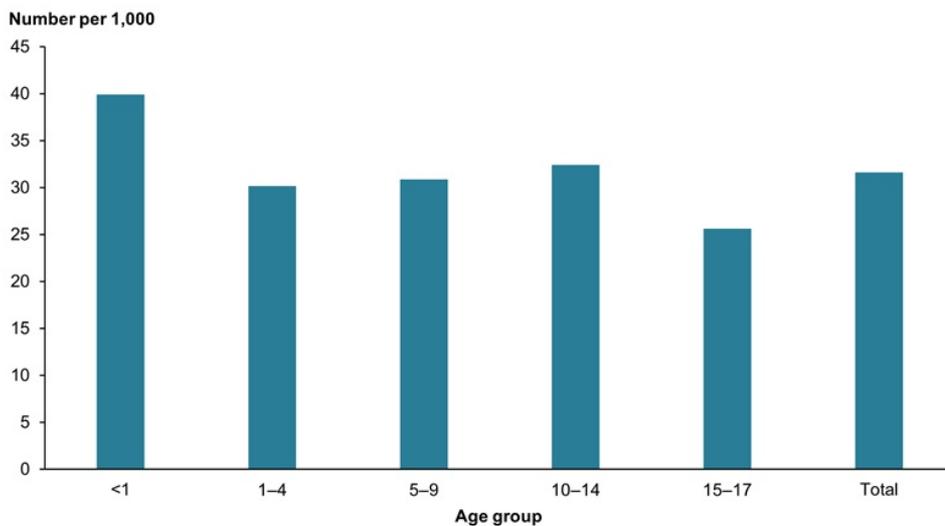
Children receiving child protection services

How old were children receiving child protection services?

Across Australia, 11,700 infants (children aged under one) received child protection services in 2020-21. Infants were also most likely (40 per 1,000 children) to have received child protection services, while those aged 15-17 were least likely (26 per 1,000) (Figure 2.4).

These findings highlight that younger children are considered the most vulnerable, and as a result, most jurisdictions have specific policies and procedures in place to protect them. There has also been an increased national focus on early intervention and on providing services early in a child's life to improve long-term outcomes and reduce the negative impacts of trauma and harm (Families Australia 2020; Commonwealth of Australia 2021).

Figure 2.4: Children receiving child protection services, by age group, 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

1. Unborn children might be covered under child protection legislation, so are included in the 'Total' rate. However, they are excluded from rate calculation for the 'less than one' age category.
2. Age is calculated as at the start of the financial year (that is, July 2020) if the first contact began before the start of the financial year. Otherwise, age is calculated as at the date of the first contact during the reporting period.
3. 'Total' includes children of unknown age.
4. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S2.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 14/04/2022 v8.0

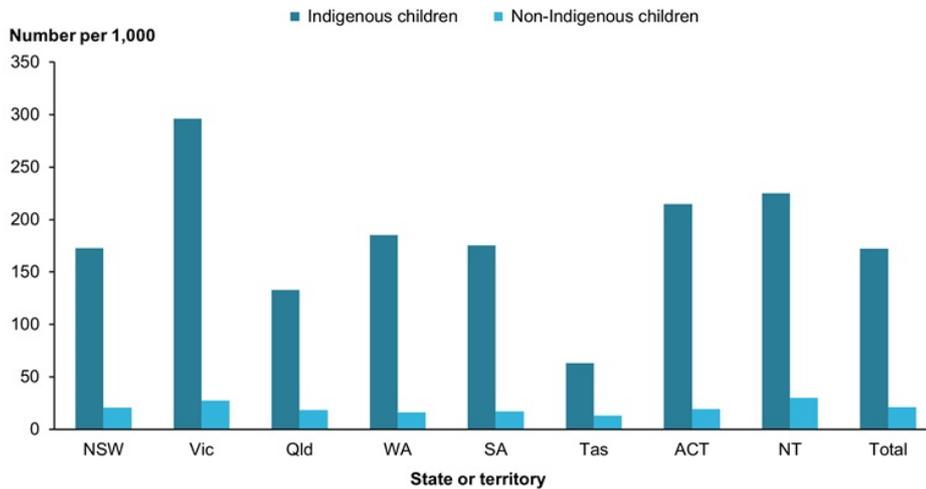
© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Children receiving child protection services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system

In 2020-21, 58,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children received child protection services, a rate of 172 per 1,000 Indigenous children. In the same period, 112,400 non-Indigenous children received child protection services, a rate of 21 per 1,000 children (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Children receiving child protection services, by Indigenous status and state or territory, 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

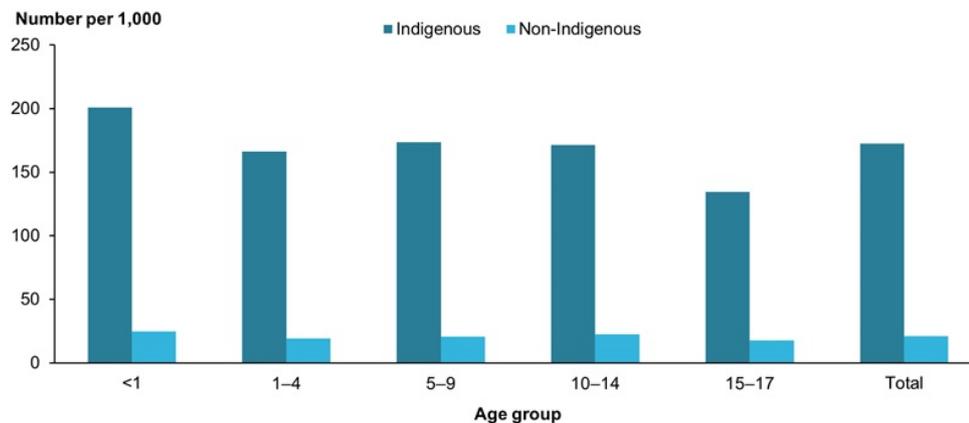
1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix](#) for more information.
2. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S2.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Indigenous children were significantly more likely to receive child protection services compared to non-Indigenous children across all age groups (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: Children receiving child protection services, by age group and Indigenous status, 2020-21 (rate)



Note: Age is calculated as at the start of the financial year (that is, 1 July 2020) if the first contact began before the start of the financial year. Otherwise, age is calculated as at the date of first contact during the reporting period.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S2.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Children receiving child protection services

Has the provision of child protection services changed over time?

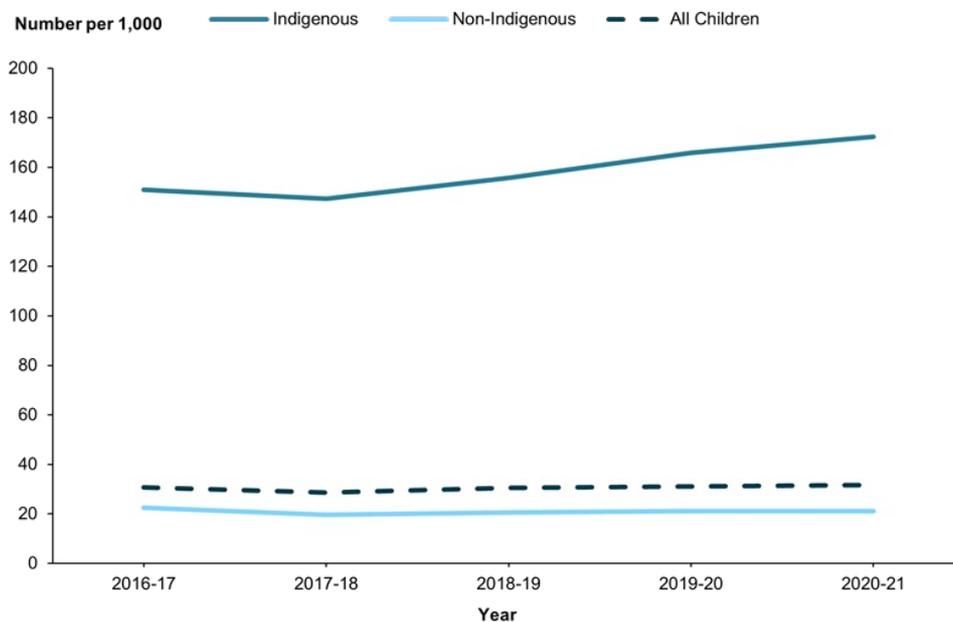
The number of children receiving child protection services rose about 6.2% over 5 years - from about 168,300 children in 2016-17 to about 178,800 children in 2020-21 (AIHW 2018). The rate of children receiving child protection services was slightly higher in 2020-21 compared with 2016-17 (32 per 1,000 versus 31 per 1,000 children) with minor fluctuations during the period (Table A1).

Changes over time in the rate of children receiving child protection services or support might relate to changes in the underlying rate of child abuse and neglect, increases in notifications and access to services, or a combination of these factors.

The rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children increased

The number of Indigenous children receiving child protection services increased from 49,200 (151 per 1,000) in 2016-17 to 58,000 (172 per 1,000) in 2020-21. For non-Indigenous children the rates decreased slightly from 22 to 21 per 1,000 children, with minor fluctuations during the period (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Children receiving child protection services, by Indigenous status, 2016-17 to 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable over time, due to differences in the way jurisdictions have collected and reported data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 22/04/2022 v15.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

Key findings

- 192,100 investigations of notified abuse/neglect were conducted for 120,800 children in 2020-21.
- 72,900 notifications of child maltreatment were substantiated for 49,700 children in 2020-21.
- 14,600 (43 per 1,000) Indigenous children were the subjects of substantiations.

How is child maltreatment determined?

Notifications, investigations and substantiations are the entry point for children into the child protection system. These components are sequential, with an initial notification of child maltreatment made to a child protection department, followed by an investigation of the alleged maltreatment (if required), and concluding with a substantiation decision (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Overview of notifications, investigations and substantiations, 2020-21

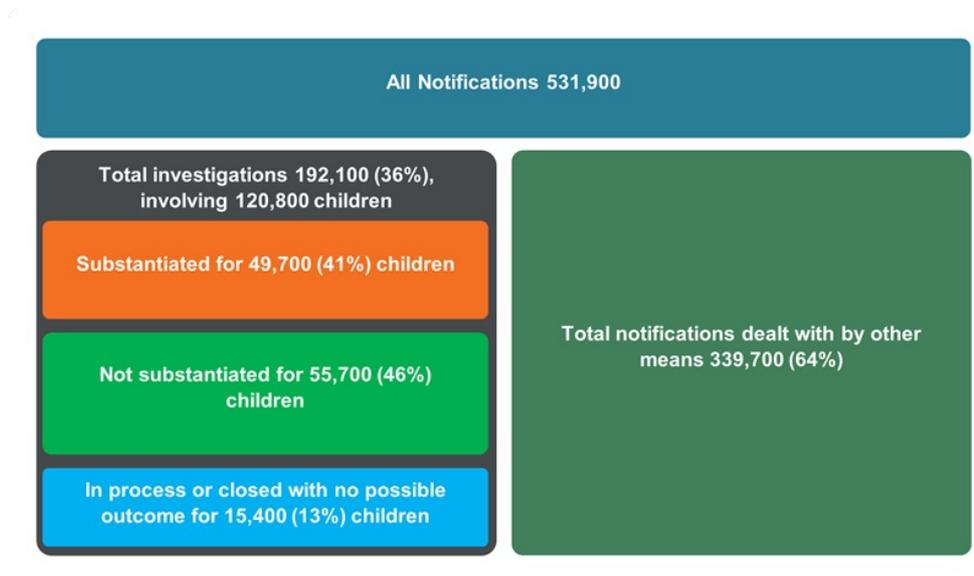


Chart: AIHW.

Sources: Supplementary data tables S3.1 and S3.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

The data in this section relate to notifications that departments responsible for child protection received between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021 (see Table 3.1 and [Appendix A](#) for further information).

Table 3.1: The process of substantiating a claim of child maltreatment

Component of the system	What is involved?	When does this take place?
Notification	A notification is a report made to a child protection department alleging child abuse/neglect, child maltreatment or harm to a child. These reports can be made by individuals or organisations.	Notifications are usually the entry point for children into the system. The notification triggers an intake process where child protection workers evaluate the report and determine what action to take. The threshold for recording a notification differs in each jurisdiction (see Appendix A).
Investigation	The process by which departments gather more information about a child involved in a notification. Staff assess the harm or degree of harm to a child, and their protective needs. Investigations also include sighting or interviewing the child where practical.	An investigation is undertaken when a notification of alleged abuse meets the threshold for further action. This threshold differs in each jurisdiction (see Appendix A).

Substantiation	A substantiation is the result of a finalised investigation which concludes that there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been, is being, or is likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. This may also include cases where children have no suitable caregiver.	A substantiation decision is part of finalising an investigation. The notification will either be 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated'. A notification will be substantiated only if it meets a threshold of harm. This threshold differs in each jurisdiction (see Appendix A).
----------------	--	---

Box 3.1 outlines data limitations for reporting on children who are the subjects of notifications, investigations and substantiations.

Box 3.1: Data limitations for children who are the subjects of notifications, investigations and substantiations

Although specifications for notifications, investigations and substantiations have been agreed for national reporting, there are differences in jurisdictional legislation, policy and practice which influence the reported data. Notification counts are not comparable across jurisdictions and differences in the initial count of notifications have a flow-on effect on other data, including the number of investigations, substantiations, and substantiations per child. Refer to the [Technical notes](#) and [Appendixes A to C](#) before comparing across jurisdictions.

Some notable issues which affect the completeness and interpretability of the data presented in this section include:

- In 2017-18, New South Wales was unable to provide data on substantiations due to the implementation of a new client management system. Therefore, substantiations data for 2017-18 excludes New South Wales.
- From 2017-18, New South Wales changed the way investigations of notifications are counted to include only field assessments. This results in lower counts of investigations from 2017-18 onwards for New South Wales.
- In July 2018, the Northern Territory introduced the One Child One Case policy which has meant that a new investigation may not be required for subsequent notifications if a child has a current open case. Consequently, fewer investigations were commenced effective from 2018-19 when compared with previous periods.
- Analysis by co-occurrence of abuse, remoteness and socioeconomic area should be interpreted with caution as the data items are not always complete.

Explore notifications, investigations and substantiations:

- [How many notifications and investigations were there?](#)
- [What types of abuse were substantiated?](#)
- [Characteristics of children with substantiated abuse or neglect](#)
- [Has the number of notifications, investigations and substantiations changed over time?](#)

Last updated 21/04/2022 v28.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

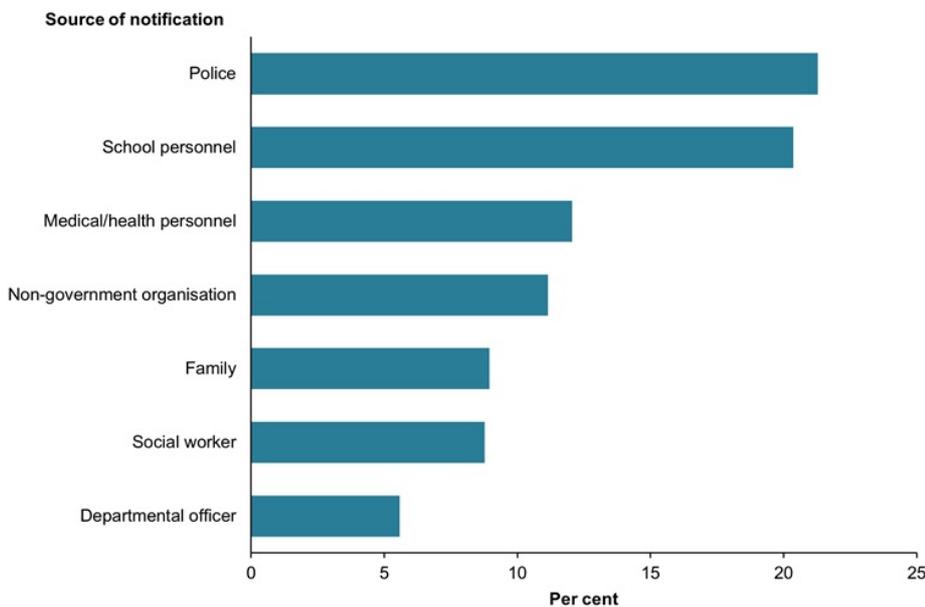
How many notifications and investigations were there?

Of the approximately 531,900 notifications in 2020-21, about 192,100 (36%) were assessed as requiring further investigation and the rest (339,700 or 64%) were dealt with by other means, such as by being referred to a support service (Supplementary table S3.1).

For investigations in 2020-21, the most common source of the notification was police (21%), followed by school personnel (20%) (Figure 3.2). Nationally, less than 1% of notifications came directly from the child involved (Supplementary table S3.2).

Notifications to departments responsible for child protection come from various sources, and legislation for mandatory reporting varies across jurisdictions. This should be taken into consideration when interpreting these data. For more information, see [mandatory reporting information by jurisdiction](#).

Figure 3.2: Investigations, by most common source of notification, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: Not all notification sources are shown - see Supplementary table S3.2 for more information.

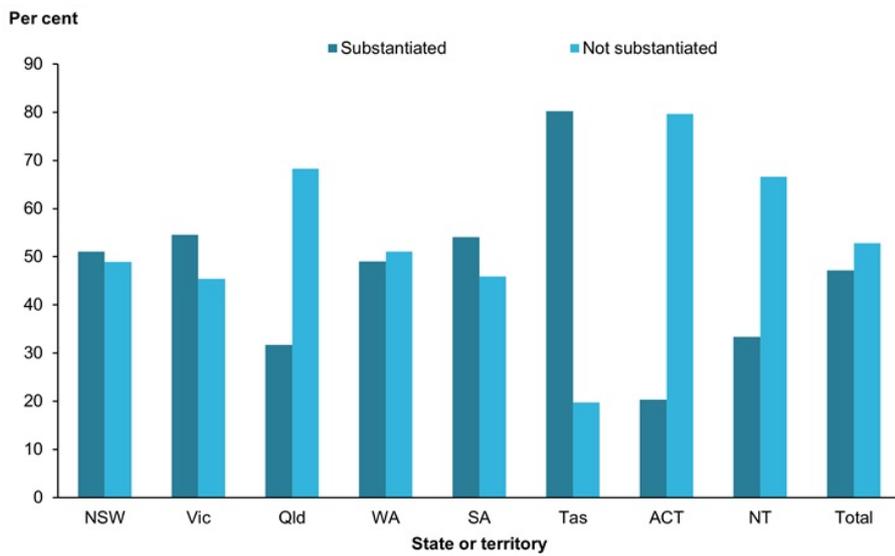
Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21

Finalised investigations are notifications made during 2020-21 that were investigated and for which an outcome of either 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated' was recorded by 31 August 2021. The cut-off point of 31 August allows time to investigate notifications made close to the end of the financial year. The outcomes of investigations that are still in process after this cut-off (6.3% of total notifications or 9.1% of children in investigations) are not reported in the data for this or subsequent reporting periods (supplementary tables S3.1 and S3.3). See for more information on investigations in process.

Almost half (47%) of the children in finalised investigations were the subjects of substantiations in 2020-21 (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Children who were the subject of finalised investigations, by outcome and state or territory, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: Data presented in this figure are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 22/04/2022 v22.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

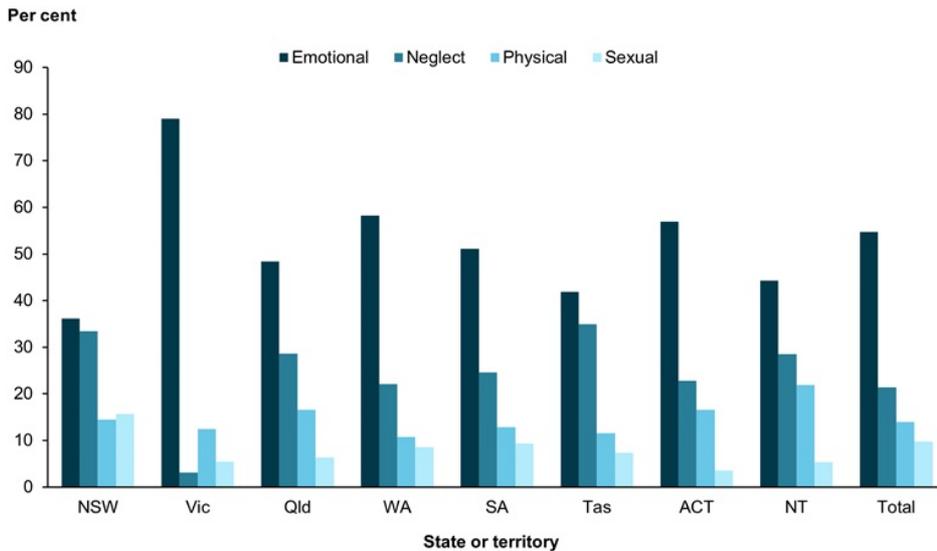
Notifications, investigations and substantiations

What types of abuse were substantiated?

The type of abuse or neglect reported for children who were the subjects of substantiations is the type considered most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term - generally known as the 'primary' type of abuse or neglect.

In 2020-21, emotional abuse was the most common primary type of abuse substantiated for children (55%), followed by neglect (21%), physical abuse (14%), and sexual abuse (10%), with some variation between jurisdictions (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received, by primary type of abuse or neglect and state or territory, 2020-21 (per cent)



Notes:

1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. Only the type of abuse that is most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term is reported for the first substantiation in the reporting period.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Other types of abuse or neglect might also be recorded as part of a substantiation. The co-occurrence of abuse and neglect refers to substantiations where both primary and other types of abuse were recorded.

Table 3.2 shows the recorded co-occurrence of primary types of abuse or neglect with other types of abuse or neglect. As well as being the most common primary types reported, emotional abuse (36%) and neglect (30%) were also the most likely types to co-occur.

Emotional abuse co-occurred in almost half (47%) of substantiations where physical abuse was the primary type of abuse or neglect, and in 36% of substantiations where neglect was the primary type.

Neglect co-occurred in 34% of substantiations where emotional abuse was the primary type of abuse, and in 29% of substantiations where physical abuse was the primary type.

The co-occurrence of sexual abuse was much lower than all other types of abuse or neglect, at less than 3% (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Co-occurrence of substantiated types of abuse and neglect, by primary type of abuse or neglect, 2020-21 (per cent)

Primary type of abuse or neglect ^{(a)(b)}	Co-occurring physical abuse	Co-occurring sexual abuse	Co-occurring emotional abuse	Co-occurring neglect	Total number of substantiations
Physical abuse	. .	4.7	47.3	29.2	10,591
Sexual abuse	11.6	. .	18.8	12.4	6,741
Emotional abuse	29.1	2.4	. .	34.2	36,376

Neglect	13.5	2.9	35.8	. .	18,995
Average co-occurrence^(c)	22.4	2.9	36.0	30.4	72,703

- a. Not all jurisdictions were able to provide data for all types of co-occurring abuse or neglect - some jurisdictions were able to report only primary and secondary types - so the proportion of co-occurring types of abuse might be understated.
- b. Excludes cases where the primary type of abuse was unknown.
- c. 'Average co-occurrence' is equal to the total number of cases where the type of abuse or neglect of interest was identified as co-occurring, divided by the total number of substantiations where the given type of abuse or neglect was not the primary type.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 14/04/2022 v12.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

Characteristics of children with substantiated abuse or neglect

On this page:

- [Younger children were more likely to be subjects of substantiations](#)
- [Types of abuse or neglect differed between boys and girls](#)
- [Higher rates of substantiations in geographically remote areas](#)
- [Substantiations more likely in lower socioeconomic areas](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiations](#)
- [References](#)

Younger children were more likely to be subjects of substantiations

Age is one of the factors that child protection workers consider when determining the time taken to respond to a notification, the type of response, and whether a notification will be substantiated.

In 2020-21, children in younger age groups were more likely to be the subjects of substantiations than those in older age groups.

Infants (children aged under one) were most likely (17 per 1,000 children) to be the subjects of substantiations, and those aged 15-17 least likely (5 per 1,000). This pattern was consistent across jurisdictions (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications, by age group and state or territory, 2020-21 (rate)

State or territory	Less than one (number per 1,000)	1 to 4 (number per 1,000)	5 to 9 (number per 1,000)	10 to 14 (number per 1,000)	15 to 17 (number per 1,000)	0 to 17 (number per 1,000)	All children (number per 1,000)
NSW	14.4	10.0	9.0	10.1	7.2	9.6	10.1
Vic	26.4	12.2	10.8	11.0	6.5	11.3	11.3
Qld	7.6	5.1	5.0	5.3	3.0	4.9	5.4
WA	11.3	8.2	7.2	5.9	3.1	6.6	7.0
SA	24.3	8.2	6.3	5.0	2.5	6.6	6.6
Tas	5.5	3.6	3.4	2.8	2.4	3.2	3.6
ACT	5.5	3.6	3.4	2.8	2.3	3.5	3.5
NT	63.8	26.6	22.7	25.9	17.2	26.0	26.0
Total	16.6	9.2	8.2	8.4	5.3	8.5	8.8

Notes:

1. Data presented in this table are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. Unborn children might be covered under child protection legislation, so are included in this table. But they are excluded in rate calculations for the 'less than one' and '0-17' categories. Unborn children are included in the 'All children' rates.
3. 'All children' includes children of unknown age.
4. Finalised investigations, and thus substantiations, refer only to cases that were notified during the reporting period, and finalised by 31 August. This excluded finalised investigations that were notified in a previous reporting period.
5. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

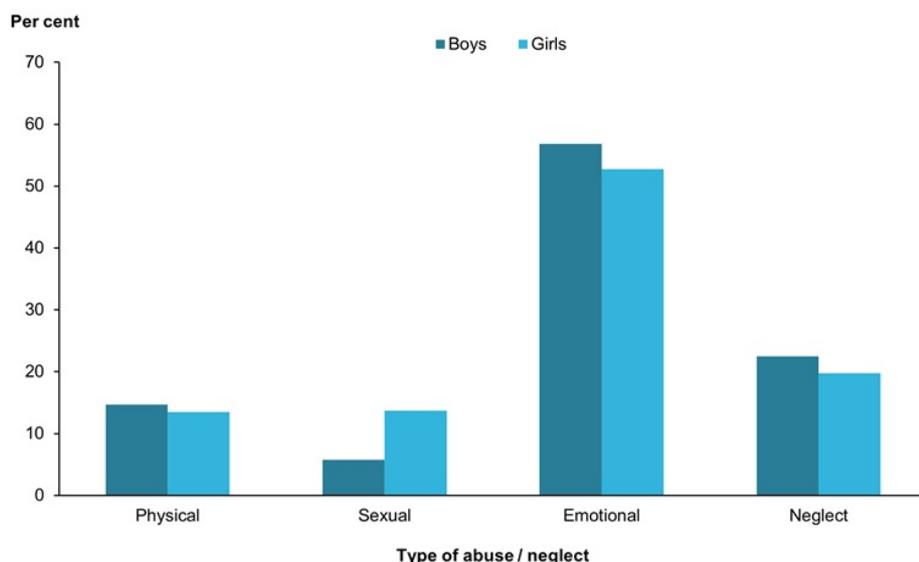
Types of abuse or neglect differed between boys and girls

Slightly more girls (25,100) than boys (23,600) were the subjects of substantiations (Supplementary table S3.5).

A higher proportion of girls (14%) were the subjects of substantiations for sexual abuse than boys (5.8%) (Figure 3.5). This is consistent with recorded crime statistics for sexual assault (ABS 2020).

In contrast, boys had slightly higher proportions of substantiations for emotional abuse, neglect and physical abuse (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications, by primary type of abuse or neglect and sex, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: Only the type of abuse that is most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term is reported for the first substantiation in the reporting period.

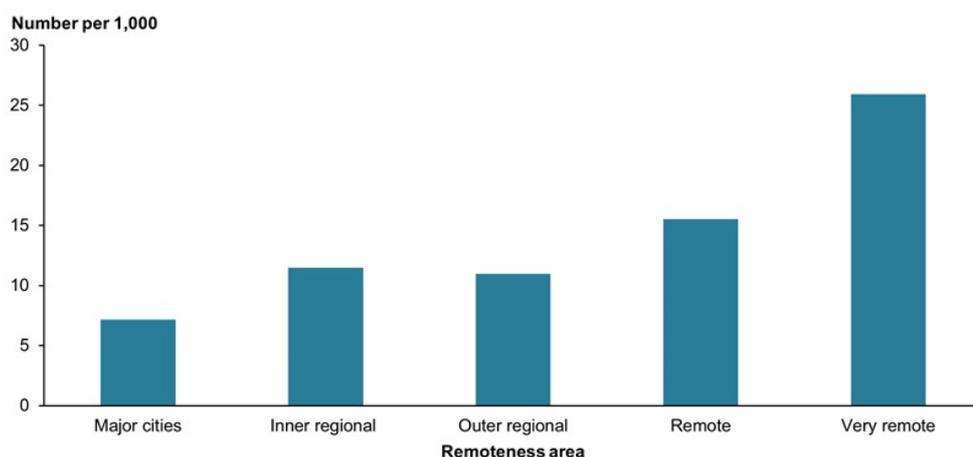
Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Higher rates of substantiations in geographically remote areas

Children from geographically remote areas had the highest rates of substantiations - children from *Very remote* areas (26 per 1,000 children) were more than 3 times as likely as those from *Major cities* (7 per 1,000) to be the subject of a substantiation (Figure 3.6; Supplementary table S3.7b).

Figure 3.6: Children who were the subjects of substantiations, by remoteness area, 2020-21 (rate)



Note: See [Technical notes](#) for more information on the calculation of remoteness areas.

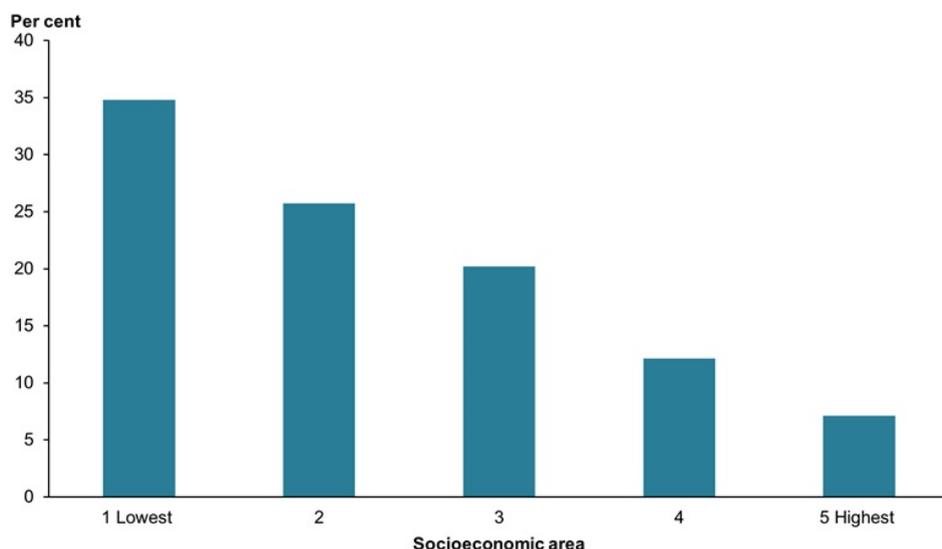
Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.7b, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Substantiations more likely in lower socioeconomic areas

Children who were the subjects of substantiations were more likely to be from the lowest socioeconomic areas (35% or 16,800 in the lowest socioeconomic area compared with 7.1% or 3,400 in the highest) (Figure 3.7; Supplementary table S3.8).

Figure 3.7: Children who were the subjects of substantiations, by socioeconomic area, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: See [Technical notes](#) for more information on the calculation of remoteness areas.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.8, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

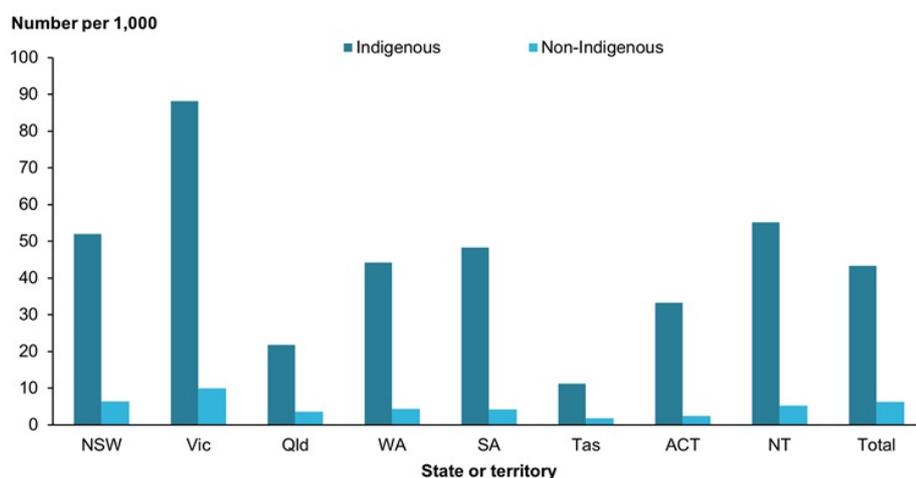
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in substantiations

In 2020-21, 14,600 Indigenous children were the subject of a substantiation. This is a rate of 43 per 1,000 (Figure 3.8).

The reasons for the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection substantiations are complex. Factors impacting over-representation include:

- the legacy of past policies of forced removal
- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- a higher likelihood of living in the lowest socioeconomic areas
- perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing practices (HREOC 1997).

Figure 3.8: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2020-21, by Indigenous status and state or territory (rate)



Notes:

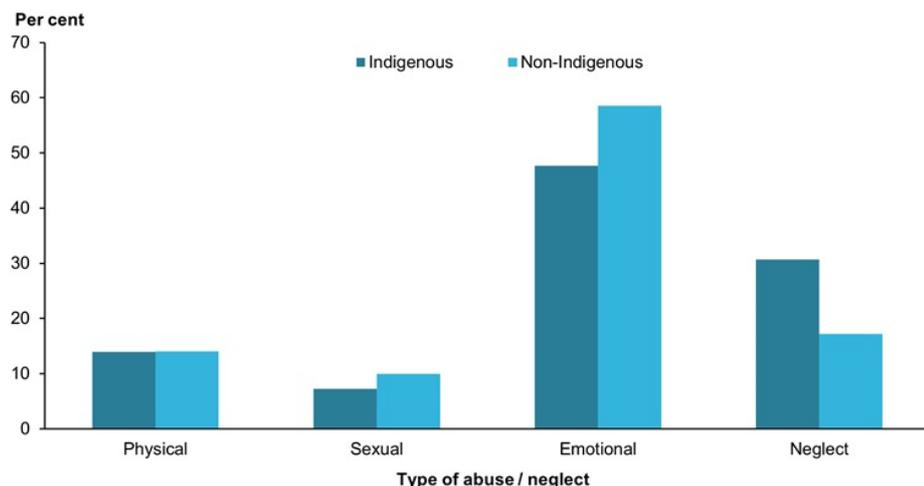
1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.9, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Emotional abuse was the most common primary type of substantiated abuse for Indigenous children (48%) followed by neglect (31%), physical (14%) and sexual (7.3%) abuse (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Children who were the subject of substantiations of notifications, by Indigenous status and primary type of abuse or neglect, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: For each child, the type of abuse/neglect reported is the type identified for their first substantiation in the reporting period. Where multiple types of abuse were reported in the same substantiation, the data reflect the primary type of abuse, that is, the one most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.10, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Indigenous children from the lowest socioeconomic areas were more likely to be the subjects of substantiations. Of the 13,900 Indigenous children who were the subjects of substantiations and could be mapped to a socioeconomic area, about 42% (5,900) were from the lowest socioeconomic area, compared to 3.9% (548) who were from the highest (Supplementary table S3.8).

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 26/05/2022 v33.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

Has the number of notifications, investigations and substantiations changed over time?

On this page:

- [Box 3.2: Trend data limitations](#)
- [The rate of children subject to substantiations has remained stable](#)
- [Children aged under one were subjects to substantiations more than any other age group](#)
- [Rates of emotional abuse were the highest of all abuse and neglect types](#)

Box 3.2: Trend data limitations

New South Wales implemented a new client management system in 2017-18 and provided limited data. As a result, substantiations data are unavailable for this period. New South Wales remedied this issue and have provided substantiations data from 2018-19 onwards. Trends in this section should be interpreted with caution and should not be compared to previous versions of *Child protection Australia*.

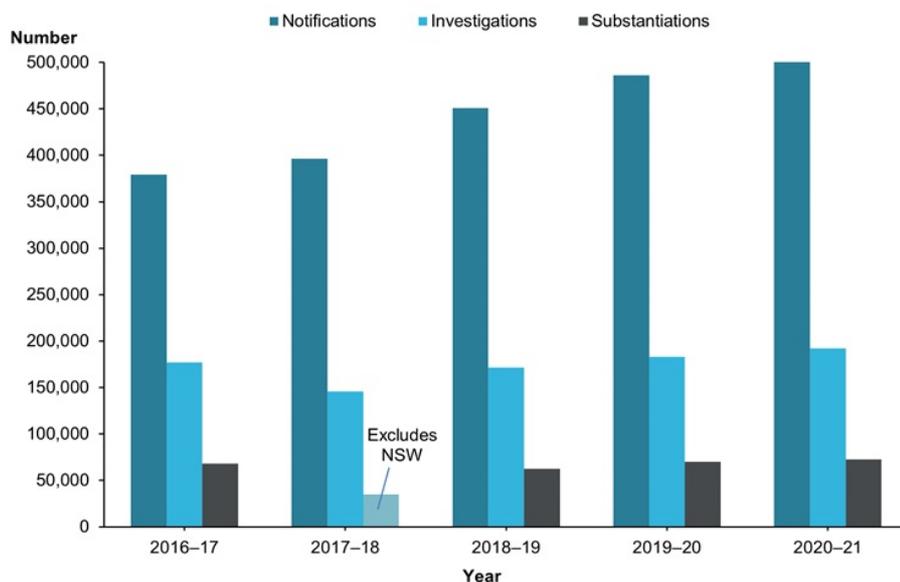
See Box 1.2 for further information about data limitations specific to this report.

Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, numbers rose by:

- 40% for notifications (379,500 in 2016-17 to 531,900 in 2020-21)
- 8.5% for investigations (177,100 in 2016-17 to 192,100 in 2020-21)
- 7.2% for substantiations (68,000 in 2016-17 to 72,900 in 2020-21) (Figure 3.10)

Although nationally notifications and substantiations rose over the 5 years, the size and direction of change varied across jurisdictions (supplementary tables S3.11 and S3.12).

Figure 3.10: Trends in notifications, investigations and substantiations, 2016-17 to 2020-21



Notes:

1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable over time due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations and how this has changed over time. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. For 2017-18 onwards, New South Wales data for 'Investigation' and 'Dealt with by other means' are not comparable with data published previously. 'Investigation' counts changed to only include field assessments, while all office-based assessments are now counted in the 'Dealt with by other means' category.
3. Substantiations data are unavailable for New South Wales for 2017-18, as the state implemented a new client management system during that year.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table T1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

The rate of children subject to substantiations has remained stable

The rate of children who were the subjects of notifications rose from 43 per 1,000 children in 2016-17 to 52 per 1,000 in 2020-21 (Figure 3.11).

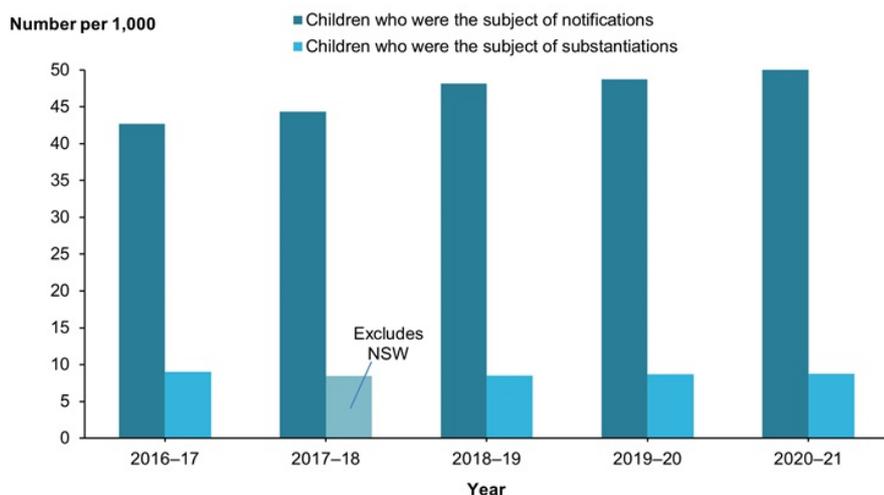
The rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations has remained stable from 2016-17 to 2020-21, at 9 per 1,000 children.

For state/territory trend data on the number and rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations between 2016-17 and 2020-21, see Table A1.

Legislative changes, increased public awareness, and inquiries into child protection processes, along with real rises in abuse and neglect, could influence increases in the number of notifications and the number of children who were the subject of them.

Information on state and territory policies and practices, and on the various inquiries into state and territory child protection services that might have increased public awareness, is provided in [Appendixes A-C](#).

Figure 3.11: Children who were the subjects of child protection notifications and substantiations, 2016-17 to 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable over time due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations and how this has changed over time. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. Substantiations data are unavailable for New South Wales for 2017-18, as the state implemented a new client management system during that year.
3. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

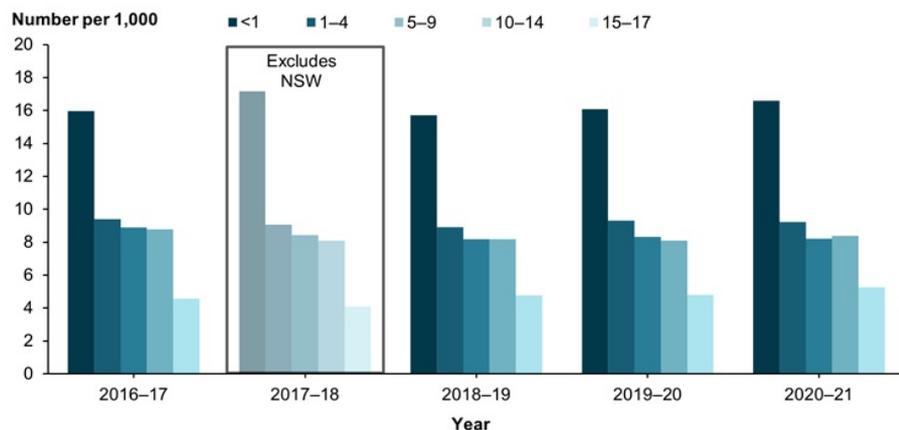
Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table T1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Children aged under one were subjects of substantiations more than any other age group

Since 2016-17, the rates of children aged under one who were the subjects of substantiations have been consistently higher than the rates for any other age group. The rate of children aged under one who were the subjects of substantiations was up slightly in 2020-21 (17 per 1,000 children) compared to 2016-17 (16 per 1,000 children) with minor fluctuations during the period. The rates for most other age groups remained either relatively stable or varied slightly over the 5-year period (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12: Trends in children who were the subjects of substantiations, by age group, 2016-17 to 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable over time due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations and how this has changed over time. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. Substantiations data are unavailable for New South Wales for 2017-18, as the state implemented a new client management system during that year.
3. Unborn children might be covered under child protection legislation, so are included elsewhere in this report. But they are excluded from the 'less than one year' age group in this figure.
4. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

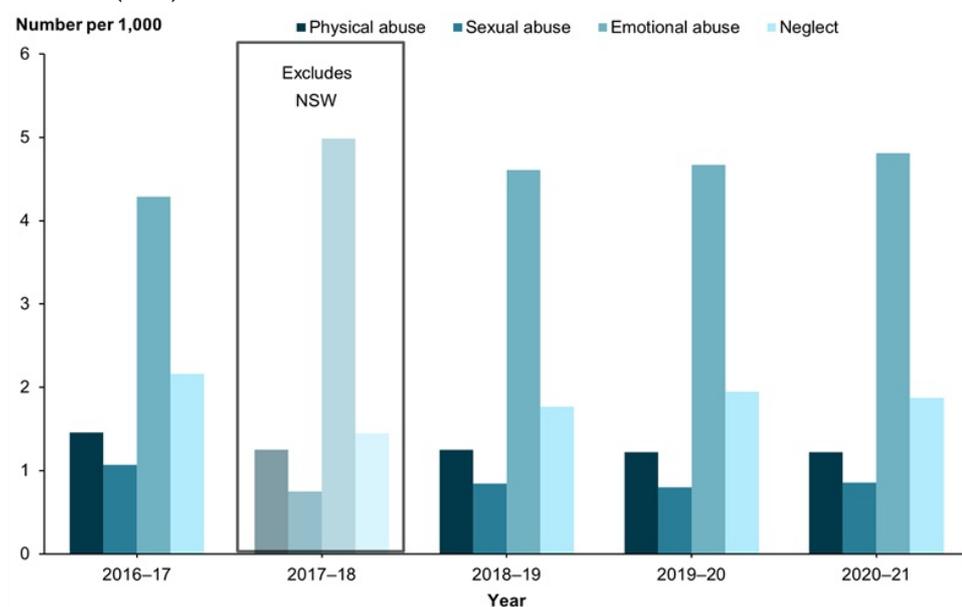
Source: Supplementary data table S3.13, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Rates of emotional abuse were the highest of all abuse and neglect types

Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, the rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations for emotional abuse were the highest of all types of abuse or neglect. The rate of emotional abuse increased slightly from 4 to 5 per 1,000 children over this time.

The rates for all other types of abuse remained relatively unchanged over the 5 years to 2020-21 (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13: Trends in children who were the subjects of substantiations, by type of abuse or neglect, 2016-17 to 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable over time due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations and how this has changed over time. See [Appendix A](#) for more information.
2. Substantiations data are unavailable for New South Wales for 2017-18, as the state implemented a new client management system during that year.
3. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S3.14, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 22/04/2022 v25.0

Care and protection orders

Key findings

- Around 61,700 children were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2021.
- Of the children on care and protection orders, 39% (24,200 or 71 per 1,000) were Indigenous.
- Of the 12,100 children admitted to orders in 2020-21, 9,200 (76%) were admitted for the first time.
- 11,800 children were discharged from care and protection orders in 2020-21.

What is a care and protection order?

Care and protection orders are legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments partial or full responsibility for a child's welfare (see Table 4.1 for further information). Children are placed on care and protection orders if they are at a serious risk of harm or there are no other care options.

Figure 4.1 outlines the 3 main categories of legal responsibility conferred by care and protection orders.

Figure 4.1: Legal responsibility conferred by care and protection orders

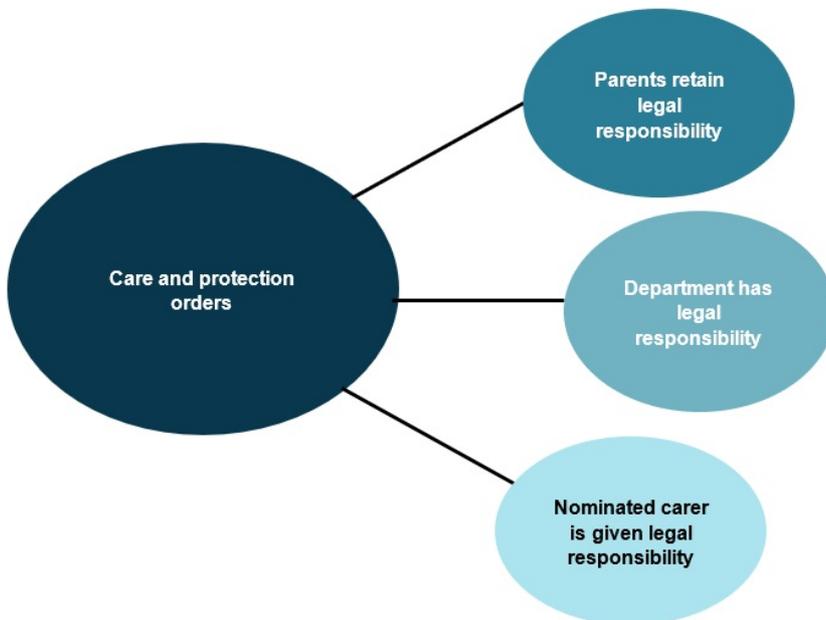


Chart: AIHW.

Children might be admitted (or re-admitted) to a care and protection order for various reasons, including substantiated abuse, irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between the child and their parents, or where parents are unwilling and/or unable to adequately care for the child.

A substantiated notification of abuse or neglect does not necessarily mean that a child will be placed on a care and protection order. If the child's parents are prepared to, or have made changes to ensure the child's safety and wellbeing at home, then the department may decide an order is unnecessary and either refer the family to support services, put a safety plan in place, or determine that no further action is needed.

Nationally, 23% of children who were the subjects of substantiations in 2019-20 were subsequently placed on a care and protection order within 12 months (Supplementary table S4.2).

Table 4.1: Types of care and protection orders

Order type	Who has legal responsibility for the child?	When is this type of order used?	Who has day-to-day responsibility for care of the child?	Duration

Guardianship order	State or territory child protection department or non-government agency	When a child is in an unsafe environment and at risk of further harm	Nominated carer	Short-term and long-term
Custody order	Child's parents retain legal guardianship when child is in the custody of a state or territory child protection department or non-government agency	When a child is in an unsafe environment and at risk of further harm	Child protection department or non-government agency	Short-term and long-term
Third-party parental responsibility order	Nominated individual approved by the courts	Parents are not providing care and a stable or permanent placement is made	Nominated carer	Short-term and long-term
Supervisory order	Child's parents (under supervision and/or guidance of child protection department)	When parents require support or guidance to provide suitable care to their child	Parents (under supervision and/or guidance of child protection department)	Short-term and long-term
Interim and temporary order	Child's parents or state or territory child protection department	Temporary care to remove a child from an unsafe environment usually occurs while another type of order is being sought	Child's parents or state or territory child protection department	Short-term
Administrative arrangement	State or territory child protection department or non-government agency	Emergency situations where children require immediate removal from an unsafe environment	Child protection department or a nominated carer	Short-term and long-term
Immigration order	Minister for Immigration or nominated carer	When children enter Australia without a relative to care for them	Child protection department or a nominated carer	Short-term

Box 4.1 outlines data limitations for reporting on children on care and protection orders.

Box 4.1: Data limitations for children on care and protection orders

A number of considerations with data related to children on care and protection orders need to be taken into account; some notable issues include:

- Some outputs are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations, and living arrangements.
- There are some differences in order types across jurisdictions. See *Child protection Australia 2018-19*, Appendix G for the most recent mapping of local order types to national reporting categories.
- New South Wales order data do not include children on finalised supervisory orders and currently do not strictly conform to the national counting rules for admissions to care and protection orders.
- Due to issues with the recording of order status, Tasmanian data for care and protection orders should be interpreted with caution.

Explore care and protection orders:

- [How many children were on care and protection orders?](#)
- [Characteristics of children on care and protection orders](#)
- [Has the use of care and protections orders changed over time?](#)

Last updated 20/04/2022 v24.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Care and protection orders

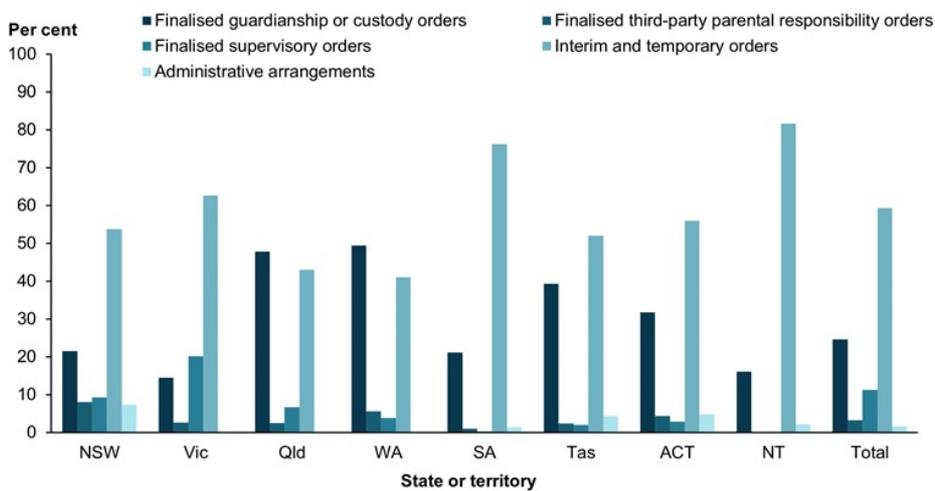
How many children were on care and protection orders?

Data is reported for both the total number of care and protection orders issued in 2020-21, and the total number of children admitted to at least one care and protection order. A child may receive multiple care and protection orders over the course of a single year. Each order is counted separately, but a child is counted for only one admission/discharge during the year. As a result, the counts of orders issued are much higher than the counts of children admitted to care and protection orders.

About 45,500 care and protection orders were issued in 2020-21. Of these, most were interim and temporary orders (59% or 27,000) or finalised guardianship and custody orders (25% or 11,200).

The types of care and protection orders issued varied across jurisdictions, reflecting both the different types of orders available, and the different policies and practices putting them into effect (Figure 4.2). The relatively high proportion of interim and temporary orders is likely to be due to these orders being in place while children are the subjects of another order application going through the courts.

Figure 4.2: Care and protection orders issued, by type of order and state or territory, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: Administrative arrangements are not applicable to Victoria and Queensland.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S4.1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Almost half of children admitted to orders were aged under 5 years

In 2020-21, about 12,100 children were admitted to care and protection orders, three-quarters (76%) of whom were admitted for the first time (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Children admitted to, and discharged from, care and protection orders, by state or territory, 2020-21 (number)

State or territory	Children admitted to orders	Children admitted for the first time	First time admissions as a percentage of all order admissions (%)	Children discharged from orders
NSW	2,246	1,919	85.4	2,391
Vic	4,564	3,231	70.8	4,615
Qld	2,934	2,257	76.9	2,306
WA	907	596	65.7	1,203
SA	819	744	90.8	561
Tas	308	137	44.5	360
ACT	125	110	88.0	112

NT	215	169	78.6	265
Total	12,118	9,163	75.6	11,813

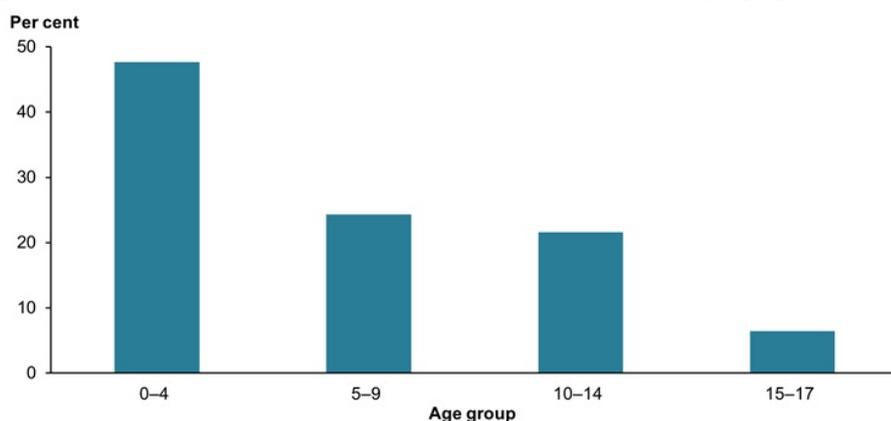
Notes:

1. Data include children who were discharged on their 18th birthday.
2. For details on methodology used to count admissions and discharged from care and protection orders, see [Technical notes](#). For jurisdiction-specific footnotes, see Table 4.2 in the *Child protection Australia 2020-21 data tables*.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Almost half (48%) of children admitted to orders in 2020-21 were aged under 5 (Figure 4.3). This reflects the previously noted view that younger children are considered the most vulnerable.

Figure 4.3: Children admitted to care and protection orders, by age group, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: For details on the methodology used to count admissions to care and protection orders, see [Technical notes](#).

Chart: AIHW.

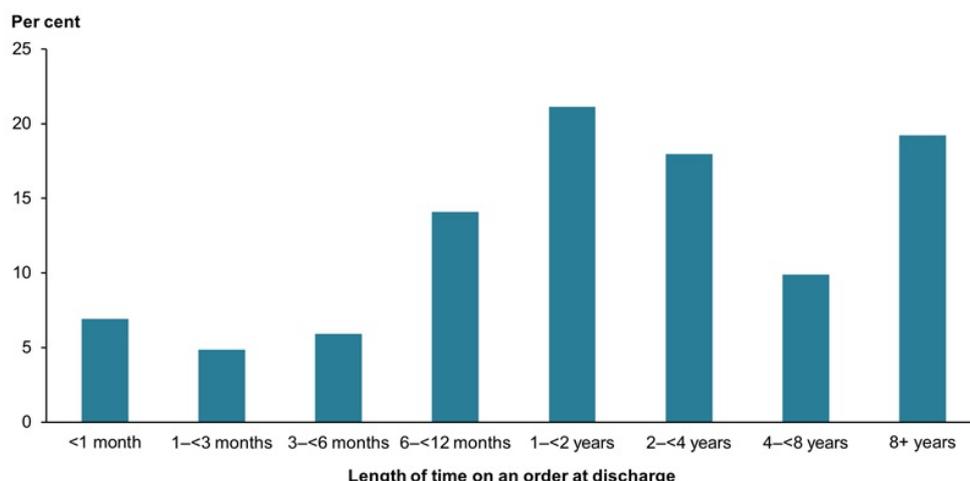
Source: Supplementary data table S4.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

A majority of children who were discharged were continuously on an order between 1 to 2 years

Of the approximately 11,800 children discharged from care and protection orders in 2020-21:

- 6.9% were continuously on an order for less than one month
- 4.8% were continuously on an order for 1 to 3 months
- 21% were continuously on an order for 1 to 2 years
- 19% were continuously on an order for 8 years or more (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Children discharged from care and protection orders, by length of time on an order, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: For details on the methodology used to count discharges from care and protection orders, see [Technical notes](#).

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S4.4, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

At the time of discharge, Indigenous children were most likely to have been continuously on an order for 8 or more years (23% or 900) and non-Indigenous children (23% or 1,800) were most likely to have been continuously on an order for 1 to 2 years (Supplementary table S4.4).

Last updated 28/04/2022 v39.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Care and protection orders

Characteristics of children on care and protection orders

On this page:

- [A majority of children were on finalised guardianship or custody orders](#)
- [Most children were placed with relative/kinship carers](#)
- [About two-thirds of children on orders were between 5 to 14 years old](#)
- [Just over one-third of children on orders were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#)

Children are counted in the state or territory where their order is operative, regardless of where the child lives.

Nationally, at 30 June 2021, about 61,700 children were on care and protection orders - a rate of 11 per 1,000 children (see Table 4.3 for numbers and rates across jurisdictions).

Table 4.3: Children on care and protection orders, by state or territory, 30 June 2021

State or territory	Number	Number per 1,000
NSW	20,414	11.4
Vic	14,898	10.5
Qld	12,515	10.5
WA	5,789	9.4
SA	4,814	13.0
Tas	1,385	12.3
ACT	917	9.5
NT	1,011	16.4
Total	61,743	10.9

Note: See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates. For jurisdiction-specific footnotes, see Table 4.3 in the [Child protection Australia 2020-21 data tables](#).

Sources: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21; Table P1.

A majority of children were on finalised guardianship or custody orders

Of the approximately 61,700 children who were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2021, almost two-thirds (61% or 37,900) were on finalised guardianship or custody orders (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5: Children on care and protection orders, by type of order, 30 June 2021 (per cent)

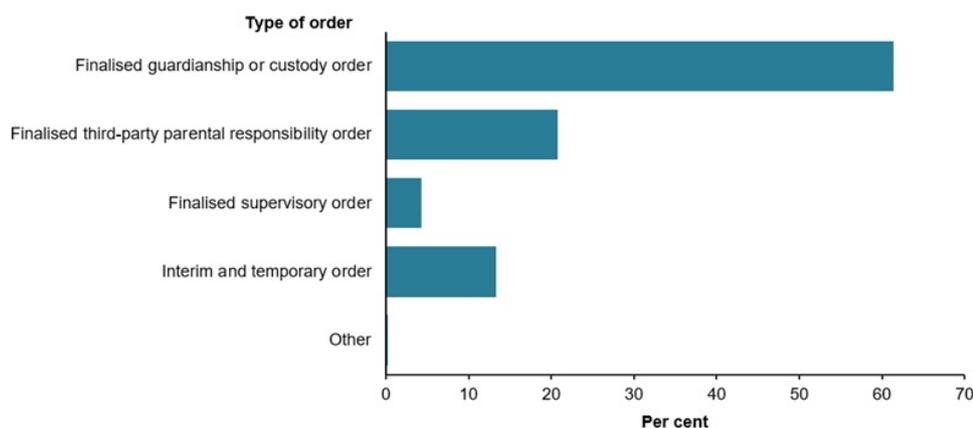


Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S4.10, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

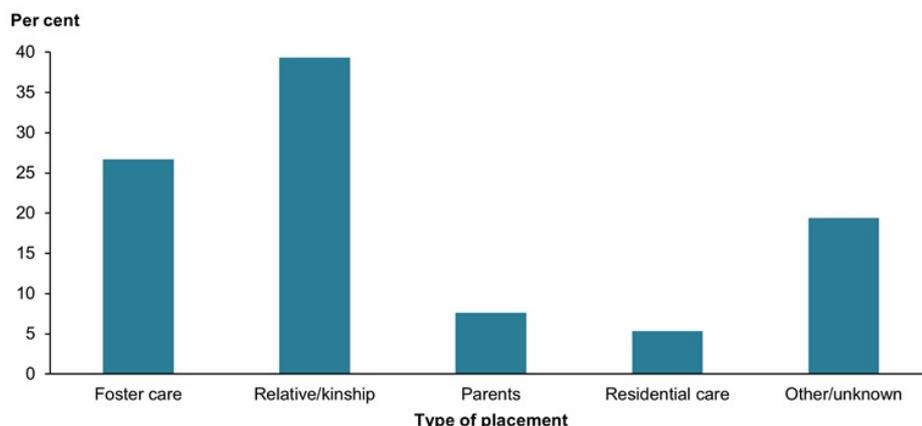
The type of order issued for each child depends upon many factors, such as the child's age; alternative care options available; the severity of harm to the child; the time period associated with various protection orders and/or the likelihood of the child remaining in care or being reunited with their family.

Most children were placed with relative/kinship carers

At 30 June 2021, the majority (66%) of children on care and protection orders were placed with relative/kinship carers (39%) or in foster care (27%).

Smaller proportions of children were placed with their parents (7.6%) or in residential care (5.3%) (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Children on care and protection orders, by type of placement, 30 June 2021 (per cent)



Note: Excludes some data for Tasmania due to small cell counts.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S4.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

The type of placement of children on orders generally reflected their age. Across Australia:

- 98% of children on orders who were living independently were aged 15-17
- 88% of children on orders who were living in residential care were over 10 years old
- 91% of children on orders who were under 5 were living in family care or a home-based care placement (Supplementary table S4.6).

About two-thirds of children on orders were between 5 to 14 years old

Of the approximately 61,700 children on orders at 30 June 2021:

- 20% were aged under 5 (compared with 48% of children admitted to orders)
- 62% were aged 5-14
- 19% were aged 15-17 (Supplementary table S4.7).

The age distribution of all children on orders at 30 June 2021 was older than that for children admitted to orders during 2020-21. This reflects that the number of children on orders at 30 June includes children who were admitted during previous years and remained on an order in 2021 (supplementary tables S4.3 and S4.7).

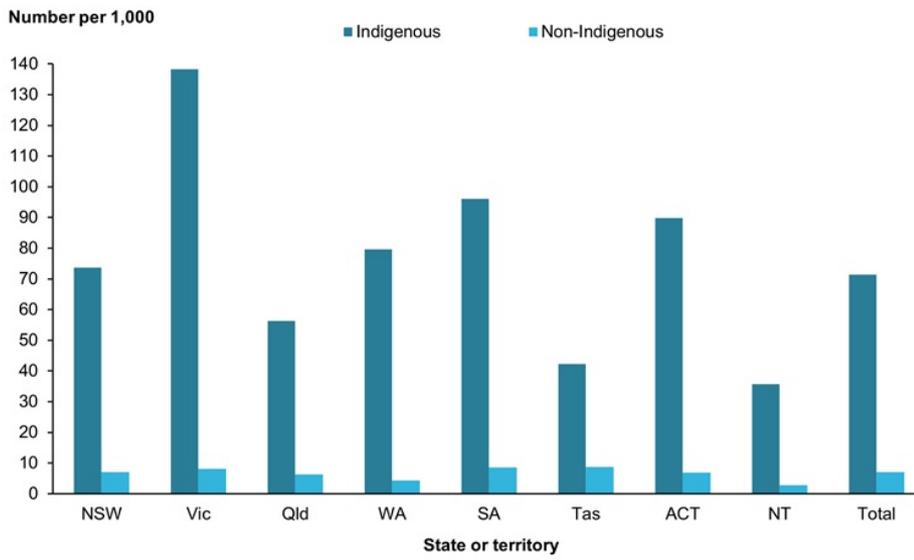
Just over one-third of children on orders were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2021, 39% (24,200) of children on care and protection orders were Indigenous. Of these children, 69% (16,700) were on guardianship or custody orders (Supplementary table S4.10).

The rate of Indigenous children on orders nationally was 71 per 1,000. The rate of Indigenous children on care and protection orders was highest in Victoria (138 per 1,000), while the lowest rate was in the Northern Territory (36 per 1,000) (Figure 4.7).

Non-Indigenous children were on care and protection orders at a rate of 7 per 1,000. The rate of non-Indigenous children on care and protection orders was highest in South Australia and Tasmania (9 per 1,000) and lowest in the Northern Territory (3 per 1,000).

Figure 4.7: Children on care and protection orders, by Indigenous status and state or territory, 30 June 2021 (rate)



Note: See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S4.9, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 26/05/2022 v26.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Care and protection orders

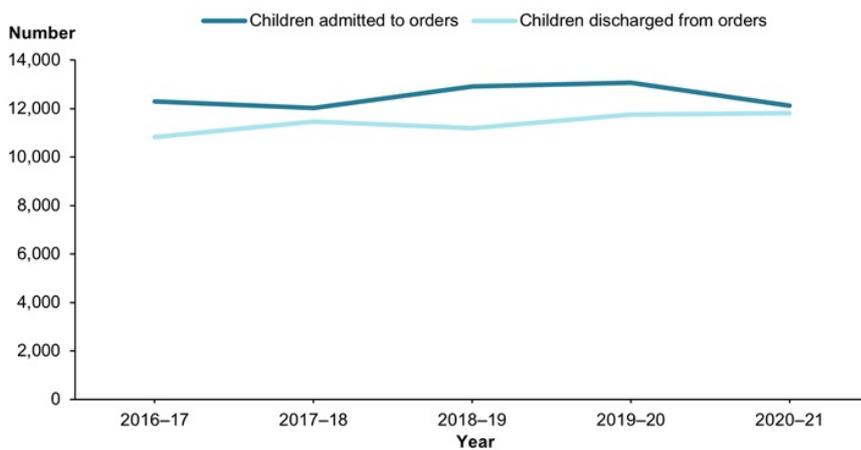
Has the use of care and protections orders changed over time?

Children discharged from orders increased over time

The number of children admitted to care and protection orders fluctuates each year, but overall has remained relatively stable between 2016-17 and 2020-21 (12,300 to 12,100) (Figure 4.8).

The number of children discharged from orders has increased 9.1% (from 10,800 in 2016-17 to 11,800 in 2020-21) (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8: Trends in children admitted to, and discharged from, care and protection orders, 2016-17 to 2020-21 (number)



Note: For details on the methodology used to count admissions and discharges from care and protection orders, see [Technical notes](#).

Chart: AIHW.

Sources: Supplementary data tables S4.11 and S4.12, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

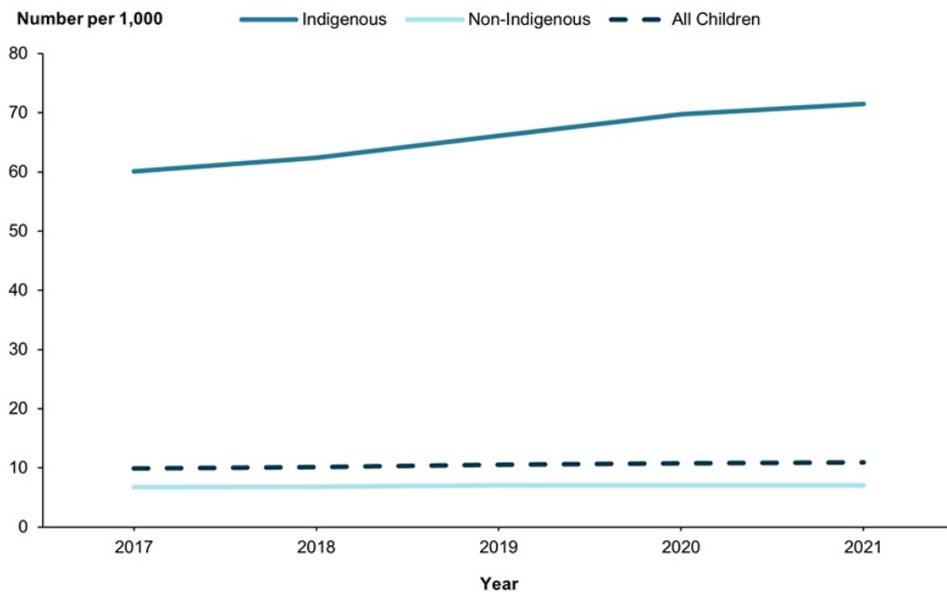
The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on orders increased over time

From 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2021, the rate of children aged 0-17 on care and protection orders rose from 10 to 11 per 1,000 children (Table A1).

Over the 5-year period, the number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders rose steadily, from 19,700 on 30 June 2017 to 24,200 on 30 June 2021, with rates rising from 60 to 71 per 1,000 Indigenous children (Table T2).

While the number of non-Indigenous children on care and protection orders rose from 34,800 to 37,500 in the same period, the rate remained relatively stable at around 7 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9: Trends in children on care and protection orders, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2021 (rate)



Note: See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Last updated 3/05/2022 v15.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Out-of-home care

Key findings

- There were about 46,200 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021.
- About 11,500 children were admitted to out-of-home care in 2020-21.
- About 11,400 children were discharged from out-of-home care in 2020-21.
- Around 31,400 children had been in out-of-home care for 2 years or more at 30 June 2021.
- About 1 in 17 (19,500) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021, at a rate of 58 per 1,000.

Departments responsible for child protection provide a range of services to support children and young people in the child protection system so that they may have stable long-term care arrangements. This includes the provision of out-of-home care placements (see Box 5.1).

Some children are placed in out-of-home care when:

- they are the subject of a substantiation and need a more protective environment
- parents are incapable of providing adequate care
- alternative accommodation is needed during times of conflict
- parents or carers need respite.

What is out-of-home care?

A nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care was implemented in 2018-19 and is presented in Box 5.1.

Box 5.1: National definition of out-of-home care

Out-of-home care is overnight care for children aged under 18 who are unable to live with their families due to child safety concerns. This includes placements approved by the department responsible for child protection for which there is ongoing case management and financial payment (including where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer).

Out-of-home care includes legal (court-ordered) and voluntary placements, as well as placements made for the purpose of providing respite for parents and/or carers.

Out-of-home care excludes:

- placements for children on third-party parental responsibility orders (see Table 4.1 for more information on order types)
- placements for children on immigration orders
- supported placements for children aged 18 or over
- pre-adoptive placements and placements for children whose adoptive parents receive ongoing funding due to the support needs of the child
- placements to which a child enters and exits on the same day
- placements solely funded by disability services, psychiatric services, specialist homelessness services, juvenile justice facilities, or overnight childcare services
- cases in which a child self-places without approval by the department.

Children in out-of-home care are generally on care and protection orders that confer most or all legal responsibility for their welfare to a child protection department (Figure 5.1). These children receive ongoing case management with a view to achieving a permanent placement or reunification where appropriate.

Figure 5.1: Children on orders in scope for out-of-home care

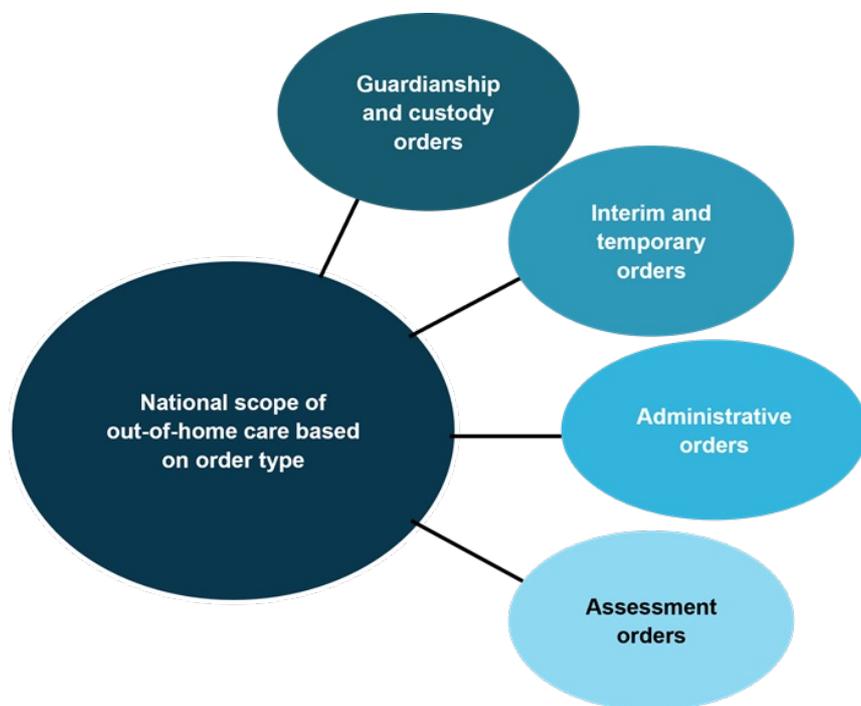


Chart: AIHW.

The national definition for out-of-home care excludes children on third-party parental responsibility orders as the minister or executive no longer has guardianship of children on these orders. However, all states and territories continue to fund carers of children on third-party parental responsibility orders and some (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory) continue to provide some level of case management.

As at 30 June 2021, there were about 9,900 children on third-party parental responsibility orders (Supplementary table T3). Children on third-party parental responsibility orders are considered to have achieved a more permanent arrangement and some data are reported in the [Permanency outcomes](#) section.

Box 5.2 outlines data considerations for reporting on children in out-of-home care.

Box 5.2: Data limitations for children in out-of-home care

A number of considerations with data related to children in out-of-home care need to be taken into account; some notable issues are listed below:

- In 2018-19, all states and territories adopted a national definition for out-of-home care. For details on how the scope of out-of-home care changed in 2018-19, refer to [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#).
- Out-of-home care trend data in this report has been back cast to 2016-17 with the national definition for out-of-home care adopted in 2018-19.
- Out-of-home care data for 2016-17 and 2017-18 may differ from those published elsewhere due to back casting.
- Out-of-home care data in this report should not be compared with data published in *Child protection Australia* prior to 2018-19 when the reporting of out-of-home care was not nationally consistent.

Explore out-of-home care:

- [How many children were in out-of-home care?](#)
- [What type of placements were children in?](#)
- [Characteristics of children in out-of-home care](#)
- [Has the number of children in out-of-home care changed over time?](#)
- [How safe were children in care?](#)

Last updated 26/05/2022 v13.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022

Out-of-home care

How many children were in out-of-home care?

Nationally, approximately 46,200 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021 - a rate of 8 per 1,000 children (see Table 5.1).

In 2020-21, nationally:

- about 11,500 children were admitted to out-of-home care - a rate of 2 per 1,000 children (Supplementary table S5.1)
- about 11,400 children were discharged from out-of-home care - a rate of 2 per 1,000 children (Supplementary table S5.2).

Table 5.1: Children in out-of-home care, by state or territory,
30 June 2021

State or territory	Number	Number per 1,000
NSW	15,895	8.9
Vic	9,146	6.4
Qld	9,433	7.9
WA	4,635	7.5
SA	4,366	11.8
Tas	1,077	9.6
ACT	690	7.1
NT	970	15.7
Total	46,212	8.1

Note: See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

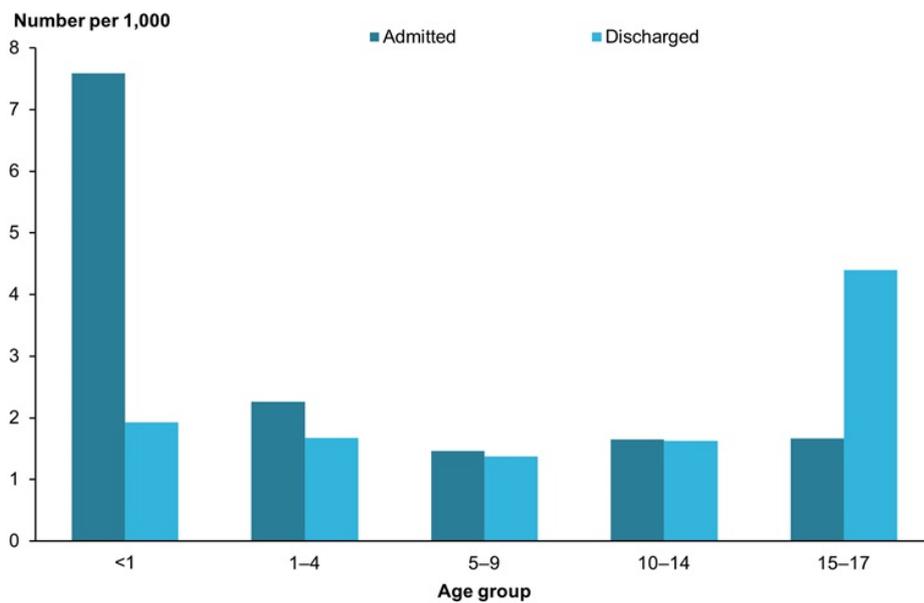
Source: Table A1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Rates of admission to out-of-home care were highest for children under one

In 2020-21, the rates of admission to out-of-home care were highest for the youngest children, at 8 per 1,000 for those aged under one. Rates of admission to out-of-home care fell as age increased and were lowest for children aged 5-9 (1 per 1,000 children). Children aged 1-4, 10-14 and 15-17 years had similar rates of admission (2 per 1,000 children) (Figure 5.2).

Rates of discharges from out-of-home care were highest for children aged 15-17, at 4 per 1,000 children, but were similar across other age groups (from 1 per 1,000 for children aged 5-9, to 2 per 1,000 for children aged less than one, 1-4 and 10-14) (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Children admitted to, and discharged from, out-of-home care, by age group, 2020-21 (rate)



Notes:

1. This figure includes all children admitted to out-of-home care for the first time, as well as those children returning to care who had exited care 60 days or more previously. Children admitted to out-of-home care more than once during the year were counted only at the first admission.
2. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Sources: Supplementary data tables S5.1 and S5.2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Rates of admission to out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2020-21, about 4,500 Indigenous children were admitted to out-of-home care at a rate of 13 per 1,000 Indigenous children. Similar differences in rates of admission to out-of-home care for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children were evident across all age groups (Supplementary table S5.1).

Around 4,100 Indigenous children were discharged from out-of-home care. The rate of children discharged from out-of-home care during 2020-21 was also higher for Indigenous children (12 per 1,000 children) than for non-Indigenous children (1 per 1,000 children).

In 2020-21, Indigenous children who were aged between 10-14 years and 15-17 years were 10 times as likely as non-Indigenous children of the same age to be discharged from out-of-home care (excludes suppressed data for Tasmania, Supplementary table S5.2).

Last updated 28/04/2022 v7.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022

Out-of-home care

What type of placements were children in?

Children living in home-based care (that is, in a family setting with a carer) have better developmental outcomes than those living in residential care with paid, rostered staff (AIFS et al. 2015; Cashmore 2011; DHHS 2014).

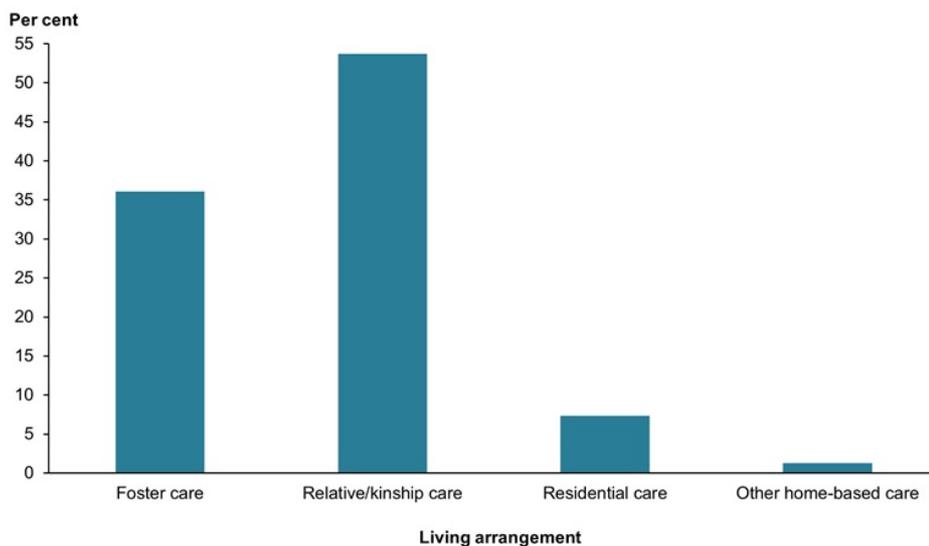
The vast majority of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021 (91% of around 46,200) were in home-based care. Of those in out-of-home care:

- 54% were in relative/kinship care
- 36% were in foster care
- 1.3% were in other types of home-based care (Supplementary table S5.3).

Data on the relationship of relative/kinship carers were available for only 5 jurisdictions, representing 36% of children placed with relative/kinship carers at 30 June 2021. For jurisdictions with available data, the most common placement was with grandparents (20%), followed by an aunt/uncle (9.0%). Only 3.1% of children in relative/kinship care were placed in a non-familial relationship (Supplementary table S5.4).

Nationally, 7.3% of children in out-of-home care were living in residential care (Figure 5.3). Residential care is used mainly for children who have complex needs. However, in many jurisdictions priority is given to keeping siblings together, which sometimes results in periods of residential care for larger family groups.

Figure 5.3: Children in out-of-home care, by type of placement, 30 June 2021 (per cent)



Note: Variation across jurisdictions in policy/practice for recording living arrangement types affects these results (see Supplementary table S5.3 for more information).

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S5.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Table 5.2 provides further information on the types of placements considered to be in-scope for out-of-home care.

Table 5.2: Types of out-of-home care placements

Type of out-of-home care	Where is the child living?	Who is caring for the child?
--------------------------	----------------------------	------------------------------

Home-based care	The home of a carer who is reimbursed for care expenses. This includes relative/kinship care, foster care and other home-based out-of-home care.	A nominated and approved carer such as a relative, family friend or non-familial foster carer.
Residential care	In a residential building with paid staff.	Staff employed to provide care to children placed in the residence.
Family group homes	A home provided by a department or agency.	Live-in carers who are reimbursed and/or subsidised for providing care to the child.
Independent living	A private board or lead tenant household.	The child is responsible for their own care, with the department retaining oversight of their welfare.
Other	The child may have another living arrangement, such as in a disability service, boarding school, hospital or hotel/motel.	These placements may have rostered or paid staff but are generally not home-like environments.

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 14/04/2022 v8.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Out-of-home care

Characteristics of children in out-of-home care

On this page:

- [How old were children in out-of-home care?](#)
- [How many children in out-of-home care have a disability?](#)
- [Most children in out-of-home care lived in Major cities](#)
- [How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care?](#)
- [Box 5.3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#)
- [How many children in out-of-home care were on an order?](#)
- [Most children had been continuously in out-of-home care for one year or more](#)
- [What are the characteristics of children in long-term out-of-home care?](#)
- [References](#)

How old were children in out-of-home care?

Almost one-third (32%) of children in out-of-home care were aged 10–14, and a similar proportion were aged 5–9 (30%) (Supplementary table S5.5).

Children in residential care were older than children in home-based care - 87% of children in residential care or family group homes were aged 10 or over. The corresponding proportion of children aged 10 and over in home-based care was 45% (Supplementary table S5.7).

Less than 2% of children in residential care or family group homes were aged under 5, compared with 24% of children in home-based care.

How many children in out-of-home care have a disability?

Children with a disability are a particularly vulnerable group, especially those in the out-of-home care system (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2016). As disability is a multidimensional and complex concept, differences may exist across jurisdictions in how disability is defined. There are also differences in how information about disability is captured in jurisdictional processes and client information systems.

In 2020–21, data on disability status was available for 63% of children in out-of-home care at 30 June. Of these children, about 30% were reported as having a disability (Supplementary table S5.8).

Most children in out-of-home care lived in Major cities

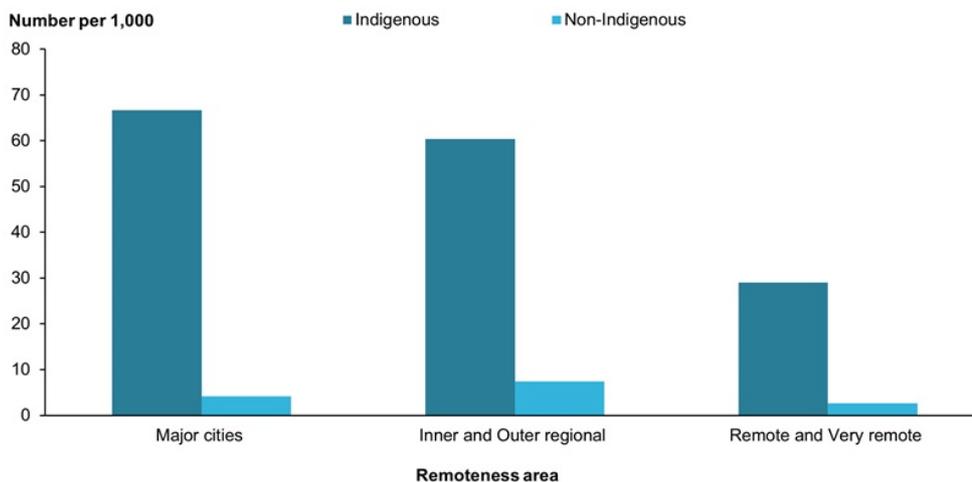
At 30 June 2021, more than half (54%) of the children in out-of-home care lived in *Major cities*, and 42% lived in *Inner regional* and *Outer regional* areas (based on SA2 or postcode of living arrangement) (Supplementary table S5.9a).

The rates for children in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were more than twice that of those in *Major cities* for children living in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021 (Supplementary table S5.9b).

About 8,400 (67 per 1,000) Indigenous children in out-of-home care were living in *Major cities*, while 1,500 (29 per 1,000) Indigenous children in out-of-home care were in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas (Figure 5.4).

The rates for non-Indigenous children in out-of-home care were highest in *Inner* and *Outer regional* areas (7 per 1,000). Similarly to Indigenous children, rates were lowest for non-Indigenous children in out-of-home care in *Remote* and *Very remote* area (3 per 1,000).

Figure 5.4: Children in out-of-home care, by remoteness area and Indigenous status, 30 June 2021 (rate)



Notes:

1. The Remoteness Areas divide Australia into broad geographic regions that share common characteristics of remoteness for statistical purposes. For more information, see [Technical notes](#) or ABS 2018.
2. See [Technical notes](#) for the method used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

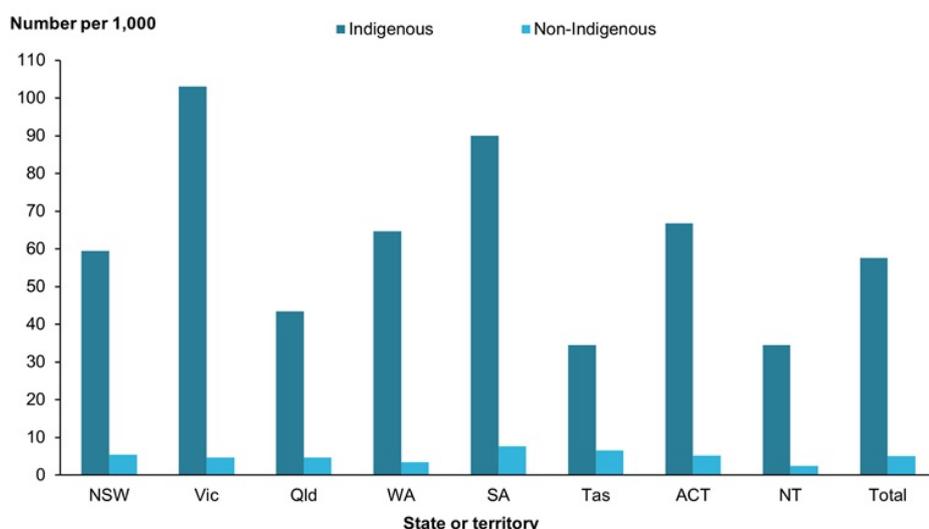
Source: Supplementary data table S5.9b, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

How many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care?

At 30 June 2021, about 19,500 Indigenous children were in out-of-home care - a rate of 58 per 1,000 Indigenous children, (Figure 5.5). (Supplementary table S5.11).

Rates for Indigenous children in out-of-home care varied by age groups. Indigenous children aged 5-9 and 10-14 had the highest rates of out-of-home care (65 per 1,000 Indigenous children), while those aged under one had the lowest rate (30 per 1,000) (Supplementary table S5.11).

Figure 5.5: Children in out-of-home care, by Indigenous status and state or territory, 30 June 2021 (rate)



Note: See [Technical notes](#) for the methodology used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S5.10, AIHW Child Protection Australia 2020-21.

Box 5.3 describes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which has been adopted by all jurisdictions in legislation and policy.

The relatively high proportion of Indigenous children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives in many jurisdictions is most likely due to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (Figure 5.6).

In 2020-21, 63% of Indigenous children were placed with Indigenous or non-Indigenous relatives/kin or other Indigenous caregivers, with some variation across states and territories. This proportion is similar to that reported in previous years.

Box 5.3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

The purpose of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is to ensure Indigenous children remain connected to their family, community, culture, and country.

Core elements include prevention, partnership, placement, participation, and connection.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle outlines a preference for Indigenous children to be placed with other Indigenous people when they are placed outside their family (AIHW 2021).

The principle has the following order of preference for the placement of Indigenous children:

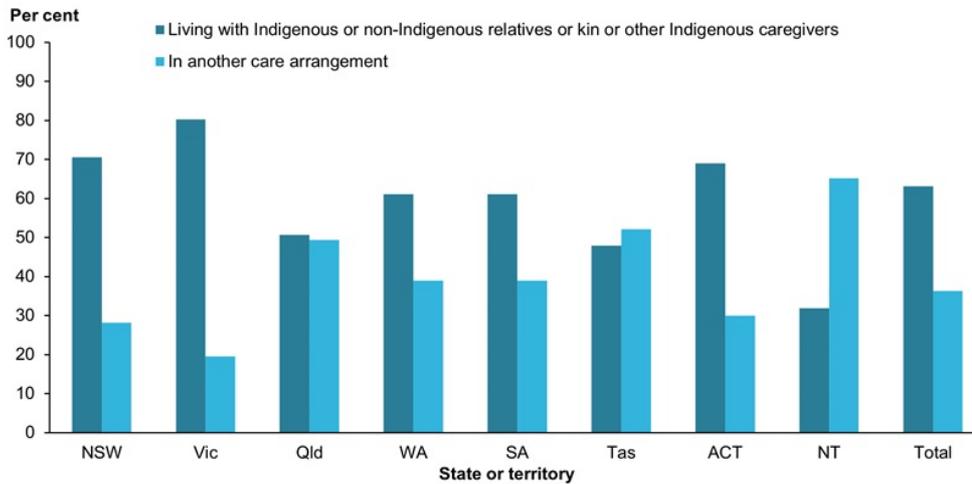
- with the child's extended family and kinship networks
- within the child's Indigenous community
- with other Indigenous people.

Where placement options outlined in the principle are not optimal for a child's safety and wellbeing, the child may be placed in an alternative care arrangement. Usually, this is done only after extensive consultation with Indigenous individuals and/or organisations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates, community services ministers, and recent Royal Commissions involving child protection matters in Australia have recognised the importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and highlighted the need to improve adherence to all 5 elements and monitoring of this.

For further information and to view related indicators, see [The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicators web report](#).

Figure 5.6: Indigenous children in out-of-home care, by relationship of carer and state or territory, 30 June 2021 (per cent)



Notes:

1. From 2019-20, some classifications have changed to better align with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle hierarchy. 'In another care arrangement' includes children living with non-Indigenous carers who are not relatives or kin, in residential care, in family group homes and children living independently.
2. Indigenous children for whom caregiver type was not stated are included in the totals.
3. For the Northern Territory, counts of children living with Indigenous or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Indigenous caregivers only include children for whom the process of making a placement decision was considered by caseworkers to be in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This means there may have been a higher number of Indigenous children living with relatives, kin or other Indigenous caregivers than is presented here. All children who were not considered to be placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle are included in the 'in another care arrangement' category, regardless of who they were placed with.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S5.12, AIHW Child Protection Australia 2020-21.

How many children in out-of-home care were on an order?

At 30 June 2021, nationally, of children in out-of-home care:

- 94% were also on care and protection orders
- 5.6% were not on an order (Supplementary table S5.13).

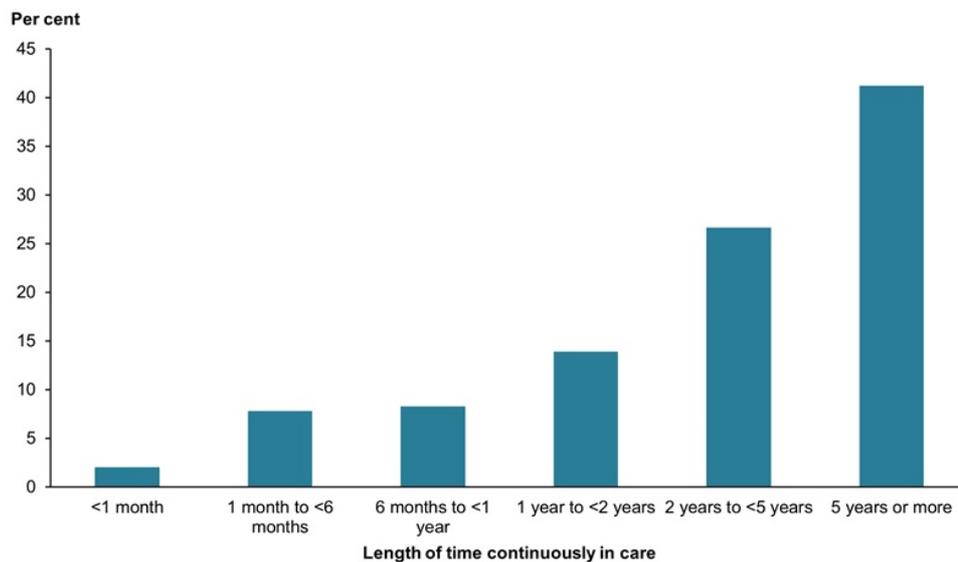
Most children had been continuously in out-of-home care for one year or more

Of approximately 46,200 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021, most (82%) had been continuously in out-of-home care for one year or more (Supplementary table S5.14). This included:

- 27% who had been in out-of-home care for 2-5 years
- 41% who had been in out-of-home care for 5 years or more (Figure 5.7).
- About 18% of children had been in out-of-home care for less than one year.

The proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in out-of-home care who had been continuously in care for one year or more were similar (83% and 81%, respectively).

Figure 5.7: Children in out-of-home care, by length of time continuously in care, 30 June 2021 (per cent)



Note: If a child has a return home or has a break of less than 60 days before returning to the same or different placement, they are considered to be continuously in care during this period.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S5.14, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

What are the characteristics of children in long-term out-of-home care?

Where there is ongoing case management to achieve a permanent care arrangement, and/or to ensure stability of placement in out-of-home care, some children remain in long-term out-of-home care for 2 years or more. The [Permanency outcomes](#) section reports on children who have exited out-of-home care to permanent care arrangements.

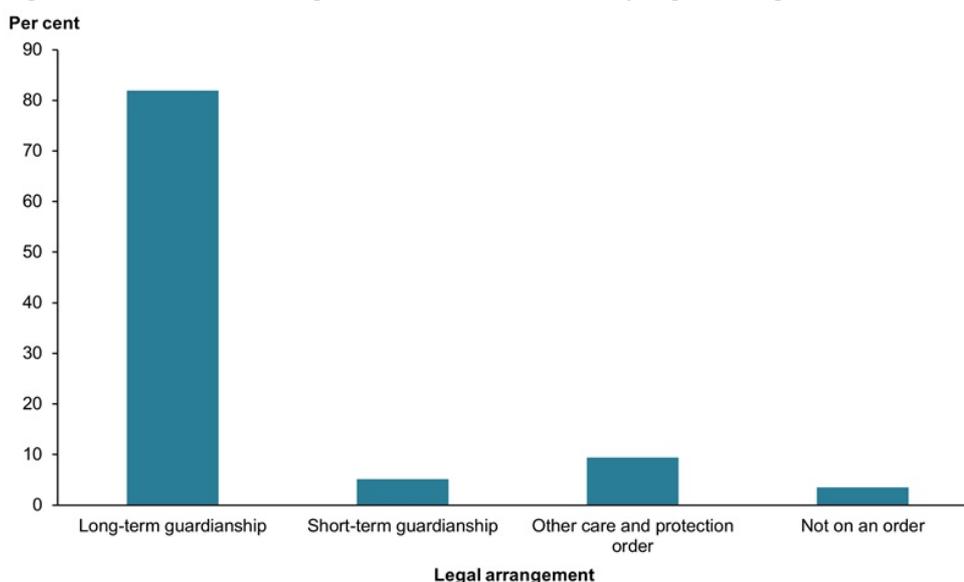
Approximately 31,400 (68%) of the 46,200 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2021 had been in long-term care (2 years or more) (Supplementary table S5.14).

Most (69%) were aged 5-14 and 43% were Indigenous (Supplementary table S5.15).

Of children who had been in care for 2 years or more:

- most (82%) were on long-term guardianship orders
- 5.1% were on short-term guardianship orders
- 9.5% were on other types of orders and
- 3.5% were not on an order (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8: Children in long-term out-of-home care, by legal arrangement, 30 June 2021 (per cent)



Note: This figure includes only children who had been continuously in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2021.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S5.16, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Most children who had been in care for 2 or more years were on long-term guardianship or custody orders living in home-based care with a foster (36%) or relative/kinship carer (38%) (Supplementary table S5.16).

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 26/05/2022 v9.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Out-of-home care

Has the number of children in out-of-home care changed over time?

Out-of-home care trend data have been back cast to 2016-17 with the national definition for out-of-home care adopted by all states and territories in 2018-19.

Data prior to 2018-19 may not match figures published elsewhere.

Between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2021, the number of children in out-of-home care rose from 43,100 to 46,200.

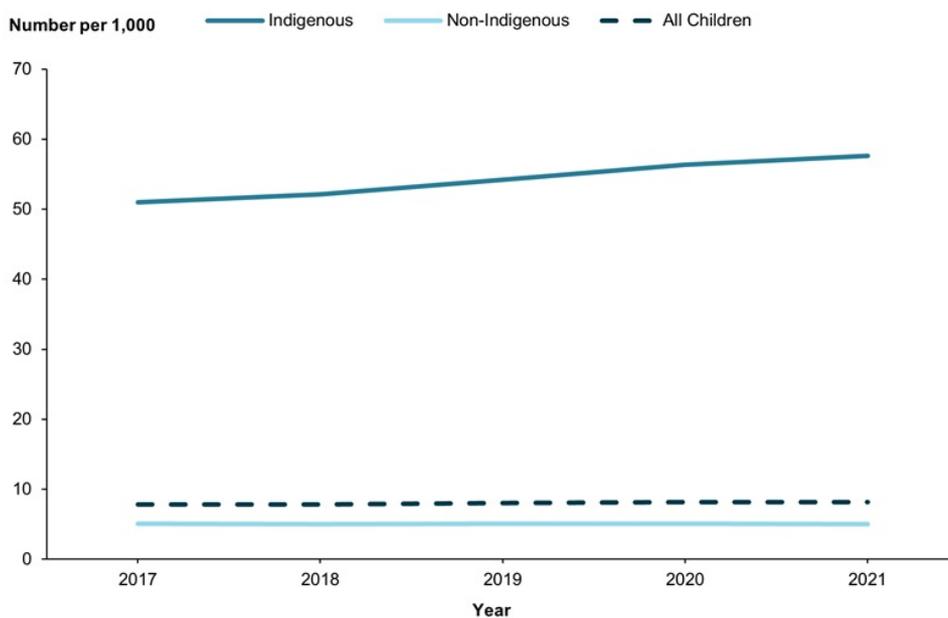
Nationally, the rate for children in out-of-home care has been relatively stable at 8 per 1,000 children from 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2021 (Supplementary table T2).

For state/territory trend data on the number and rate of children in out-of-home care between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2021, see Table A1.

For Indigenous children in out-of-home care, rates rose between 2017 and 2021, from 51 per 1,000 children to 58 per 1,000 Indigenous children (Supplementary table T2).

For non-Indigenous children in out-of-home care, rates were stable at 5 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children from 2017 to 2021 (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Children in out-of-home care, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2021 (rate)



Notes:

- In 2018-19, all states and territories adopted a national definition for out-of-home care and the out-of-home care data have been back cast to 2016-17 with the national definition. Due to data revisions, data for 2016-17 and 2017-18 may differ from those published elsewhere. Data should not be compared with data published in previous versions of *Child protection Australia*.
- See [Technical notes](#) for the methodology used to calculate rates.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

Has there been a change in children admitted to, or discharged from, out-of-home care?

Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, the number of children admitted to out-of-home care fell by 3.4% (from around 11,600 to 11,300). This was followed by a rise of 10% over the following 2 years, to 12,300 in 2019-20. In 2020-21, this dropped by 6.7% to about 11,500 (supplementary tables S5.17 and S5.18).

The overall rate of admissions remained relatively stable over the same 5 years, at about 2 per 1,000 children.

The number of admissions has consistently outnumbered discharges - in 2020-21, 135 more children were admitted than were discharged (supplementary tables S5.18 and S5.20).

From 2016-17 to 2020-21, the rate of Indigenous children admitted to out-of-home care rose from 12 to 13 per 1,000 Indigenous children, with admissions in 2019-20 being slightly higher at 14 per 1,000. The rate of admissions for non-Indigenous children in the same period remained stable at 1 per 1,000 (Supplementary table S5.17).

The number of children discharged from out-of-home care rose from around 10,300 in 2016-17 to around 11,400 in 2020-21, with a slight drop in 2017-18.

Over the 5 years, the overall rate of children discharged was stable, at 2 per 1,000 children.

The rate of discharges for Indigenous children rose from 11 per 1,000 in 2016-17 to 12 per 1,000 in 2020-21, whereas the rate for non-Indigenous children was stable at 1 per 1,000 (Supplementary table S5.19).

Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, the rates of children aged 15-17 discharged from out-of-home care were consistently higher than for any other age group.

Last updated 14/04/2022 v9.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Out-of-home care

How safe were children in care?

Sometimes a child who is in care can be the subject of further abuse, for example, by their carer or another person in the household or care facility.

In December 2021, the AIHW released a new report, *Safety of children in care 2020-21*, which presents data from a new national data collection on safety in care. It contains information on substantiations of abuse where the child was living in out-of-home care or other relevant care arrangement and complements the data in this report.

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 14/04/2022 v6.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 CC BY

Permanency outcomes

Key findings

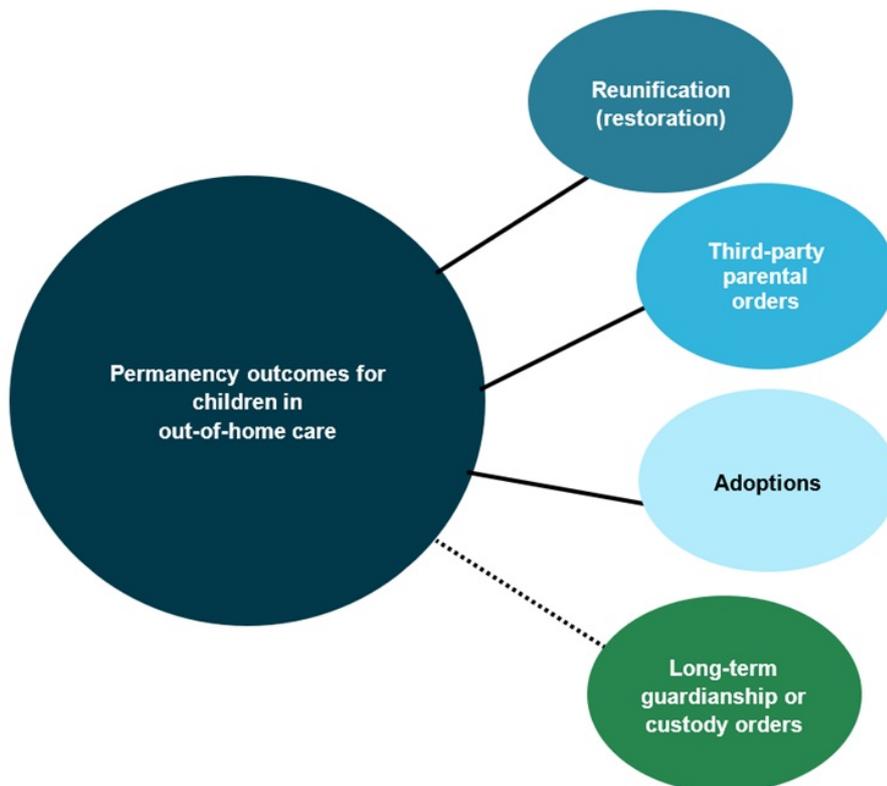
- In 2020-21, 9,900 children in out-of-home care (17% of the 56,900 children in out-of-home care during 2020-21) achieved a permanency outcome.
- Just over 50% of children who achieved a permanency outcome in 2020-21, did so within 12 months of being admitted to out-of-home care.
- In 2020-21, around 5,400 children were reunified with family, 1,300 were placed in a third-party parental care arrangement and 94 were adopted.

What is permanency?

Permanency is aimed at reunifying children in out-of-home care with their families where possible. When family reunification is not possible, permanency planning efforts focus on placing children with another legally permanent family such as relatives, adoptive families who obtain legal custody, or guardians (Figure 6.1 shows permanency events; see also Osmond & Tilbury 2012).

Given the importance of ensuring stability and permanency for children, the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (POPF) (Prentice 2018; Seselja 2017) was developed to measure performance in out-of-home care with regard to permanency. The full set of POPF indicators previously reported in *Child protection Australia* will be released as a separate product later in 2022. *Child protection Australia* reports will focus on data for children exiting out-of-home to a permanency outcome such as reunification with family, placement in a third-party parental care arrangement or adoption, and the time taken to achieve the outcome.

Figure 6.1: Permanency events



Note: Refer to the [glossary](#) for an explanation of items.

Chart: AIHW.

Box 6.1 outlines data limitations and comparability issues for reporting on permanency.

Box 6.1: Data limitations for permanency

Some notable issues which affect the completeness and comparability of permanency data include:

- There is no nationally agreed definition for reunifications. As such, reporting of permanency events relating to reunification is based on local definitions of reunification.

- Third-party parental responsibility orders vary across jurisdictions with the biggest difference relating to the provision of ongoing case management in some cases in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland.
- Some measures can be affected by different thresholds across jurisdictions, which can affect comparability and interpretation.
- Further insights into the permanency data can be found in the Appendix B in *Child protection Australia 2018-19* which outlines the methodology for permanency reporting.

Explore permanency outcomes:

- [How many children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome?](#)
 - [Time taken to achieve a permanency outcome](#)
-

Last updated 26/05/2022 v22.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Permanency outcomes

How many children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome?

In 2020-21, more than 9,900 children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome, including children who were placed on a long-term guardianship or custody order, reunified with family, placed in a third-party parental care arrangement or adopted (Supplementary table S6.3).

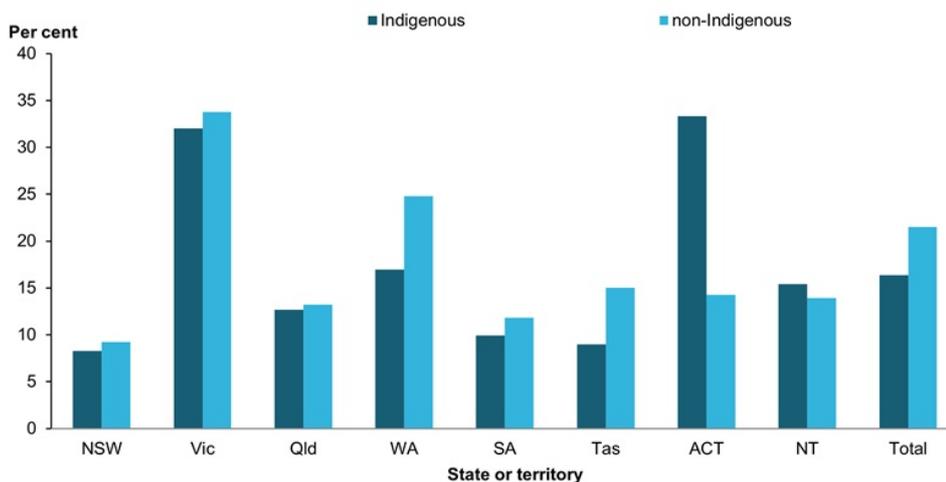
How many children were reunified?

Reunification is the policy priority for children in out-of-home care across all states and territories and aims to return a child home safely after time in care and enable that child to stay at home. This occurs when it is in the child's best interest and where it will promote long-term stability and permanency (AIHW 2016).

In 2020-21, there were about 27,300 children in out-of-home care, excluding those on long-term guardianship or custody orders. Of these children, nearly 5,400 (20%) were reunified during this time (Supplementary table S6.1).

About 1,700 Indigenous children (16%) were reunified in 2020-21. Indigenous children in the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria had the highest proportion of reunification (33% and 32% respectively). About 3,700 non-Indigenous children were reunified in the same period, with the highest proportion of children reunified in Victoria (34%). (Supplementary table S6.1 and Figure 6.2)

Figure 6.2: Children reunified with family from out-of-home care in 2020-21, by Indigenous status and state or territory (per cent)



Note: Children on long-term guardianship orders were excluded from the denominator when calculating reunification rates (see Appendix B in *Child protection Australia 2018-19* for technical specifications).

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S6.1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

How many children exited to a third party parental arrangement?

State and territory legislation emphasises the importance of permanency planning through stability of care, which is often achieved through third-party parental responsibility orders. The timing of permanency-related action is determined by the individual circumstances of the child. However, permanency planning is typically initiated as a child enters care. For many children, longer-term care arrangements such as third-party parental responsibility orders are pursued only when safe reunification is not possible, or when alternative care has been deemed the most suitable way to achieve stability for the child.

In 2020-21, nearly 1,300 children (2.3% of the 56,900 children in out-of-home care during the reporting period) exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental care arrangement during 2020-21 (Supplementary table S6.2).

A higher proportion of non-Indigenous children exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental care arrangement compared to Indigenous children (2.9% and 1.6% respectively) (Supplementary table S6.2 and Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Children exiting out-of-home care to third-party parental care arrangements in 2020-21, by Indigenous status and state or territory (per cent)



Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S6.2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

How many children were adopted?

In 2020-21, there were 94 known-carer adoptions from out-of-home care (unpublished data from AIHW Child Protection Collection).

Last updated 12/04/2022 v7.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Permanency outcomes

Time taken to achieve a permanency outcome

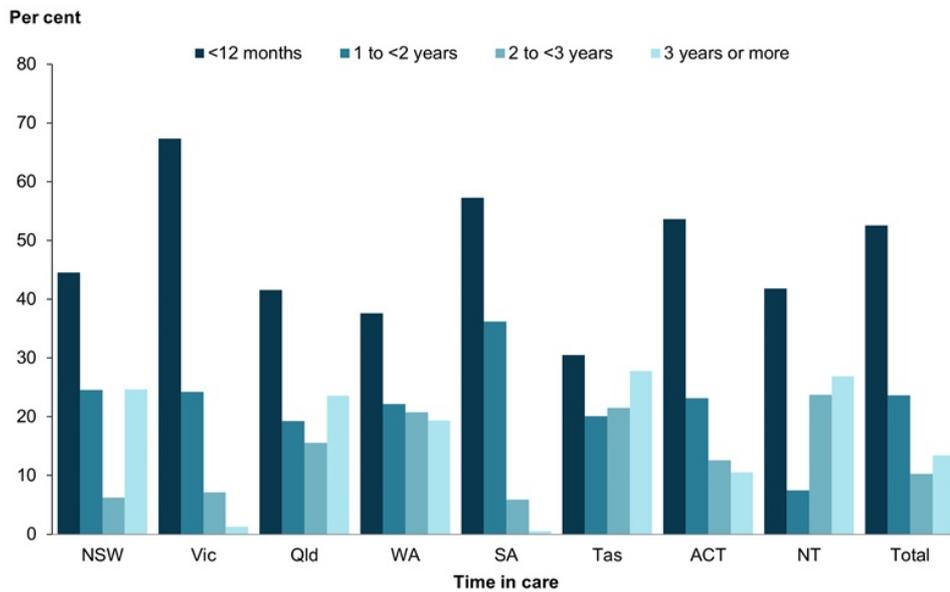
Permanency planning should commence from the time children are admitted to out-of-home care. During the time a child is in out-of-home care, a child may be on interim/temporary orders and/or other arrangements before a legal permanency outcome is identified as a possibility and a decision about permanency is made.

Permanency outcomes in this context include reunifications, long-term third-party parental responsibility orders, adoptions and long-term guardianship/custody orders. The latter recognises that for some children, especially those with complex needs or requiring ongoing case management, the best permanency outcome is a long-term placement in out-of-home care.

In 2020-21, 9,900 children in out-of-home care achieved a permanency outcome. Of these children, 76% achieved a permanency outcome within 2 years of being admitted to out-of-home care and 87% within 3 years (Supplementary table S6.3 and Figure 6.4).

Time from admission to achieving a permanency outcome for children varies considerably across jurisdictions and likely reflects different policies and practices.

Figure 6.4: Proportion of children achieving a permanency outcome, by time from admission to out-of-home care and state or territory, 2020-21 (per cent)



Note: Permanency outcomes include reunifications, long-term third-party parental responsibility orders, long-term guardianship orders, and adoptions.

Chart: AIHW.

Source: Supplementary data table S6.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 13/04/2022 v17.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Carers

Key findings

- There was a net decrease of about 205 foster carer households and a net increase of about 115 relative/kinship carer households in 2020-21 (excludes data for New South Wales).
- There were about 9,000 foster carer households with placements at 30 June 2021. Of these, over half (51%) had multiple children placed with them.
- There were about 15,600 relative/kinship carer households with placements at 30 June 2021. The majority (63%) of these households had only one child placed with them

Carers are people who have been screened and have received authorisation to provide placements in their private households for children in funded out-of-home care.

What types of carers are there?

In 2020-21, the vast majority (91%) of children in out-of-home care were placed in home-based care, primarily with foster carers or with relative/kinship carers (see Supplementary table S5.3). A smaller number of carers also provide other types of care, including respite and long-term guardianship care (see Figure 7.1 for an overview and Table 7.1 for further information).

Figure 7.1: Overview of carer types

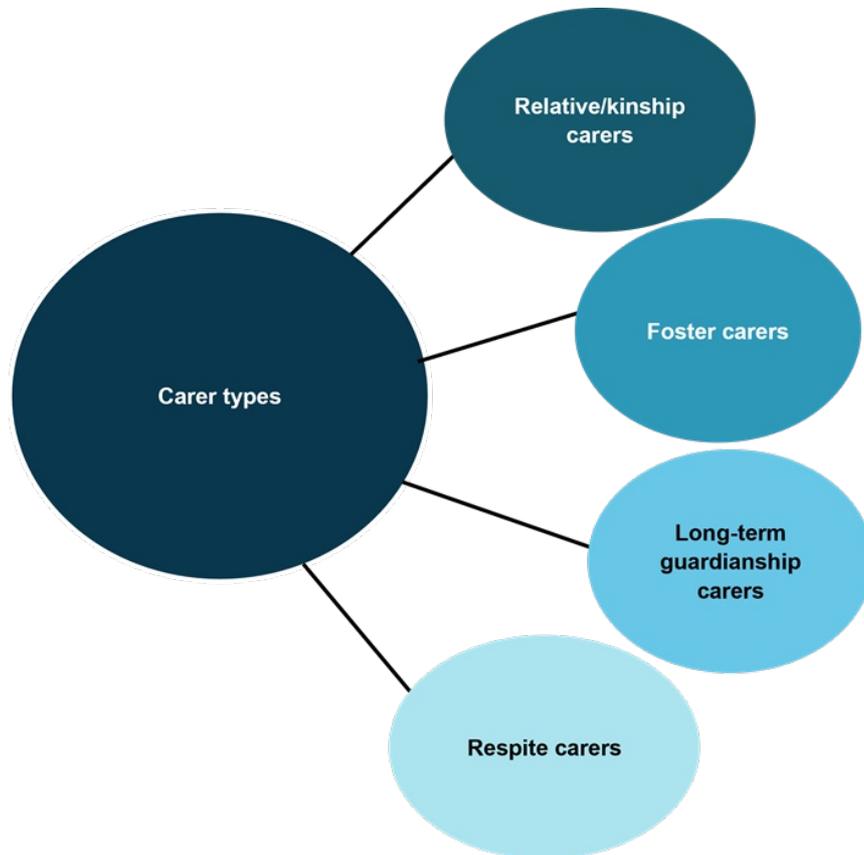


Chart: AIHW.

Table 7.1: Types of carers

Carer type	When are children placed with these carers?	How long are children placed with these carers?
Relative/kinship carers	In situations where children are unable to live at home, but a relative, close family friend or member of the child's community is willing to care for the child.	Short- and long-term placements.
Foster carers	When children are unable to live at home or receive care from a relative. Foster carers are not related to the children they care for.	Short- and long-term placements.

Long-term guardianship carers	Children are placed with long-term guardianship carers (who may or may not be related to the child) when a care and protection order has transferred full parental responsibility to the carer.	Long-term placements, usually until the child turns 18.
Respite carers	When short-term accommodation is required for children where the intention is for the child to return to their prior residence (out-of-home care or family home).	Short-term placements, such as weekends or periods of a few weeks.

Box 7.1 outlines data limitation for reporting on carers.

Box 7.1: Data limitations for carers

State and territory differences in policies and practices in relation to foster care and relative/kinship care should be taken into account when interpreting the data. Some notable differences include:

- degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers vary - for example, some carers are paid a wage beyond the reimbursement of expenses
- a carer who is authorised to provide both foster and relative/kinship care might be included in the count of both foster and relative/kinship carer
- in some jurisdictions, respite carers known to the department are registered as either 'general foster carers' or 'relative carers', so might be included in the scope of these collections. However, respite-only carers are excluded from the data.

While the majority of carer households are authorised to provide foster or relative/kinship care, a smaller number of carers also provide other types of care, including respite and long term guardianship care (see Box 7.2).

Box 7.2: Placements provided by all carer households at 30 June 2021

Expanding reporting to count the total number of unique carer households can give insight into the total number of children placed in the household, regardless of the placement type, as some carer households might be approved/authorised to provide more than one care type.

It also allows information about carer households that provide placements other than foster or relative/kinship care to be included in the count.

There were approximately 24,600 unique carer households with a placement at 30 June 2021. Of these, 58% had one child placed with them, 40% had 2-4 children placed and 2.1% had 5 or more children placed with them (Supplementary table S7.1).

Explore carers:

- [How many children were placed with foster or relative/kinship carers?](#)
- [How many households commenced and exited care?](#)

Last updated 26/05/2022 v14.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Carers

How many children were placed with foster or relative/kinship carers?

Of the approximately 9,000 foster carer households with one or more children placed at 30 June 2021:

- more than half (51%) had multiple children placed with them
- nearly half (47%) had 2-4 children placed with them
- 3.3% had 5 or more children placed with them (Supplementary table S7.2; Figure 7.2).

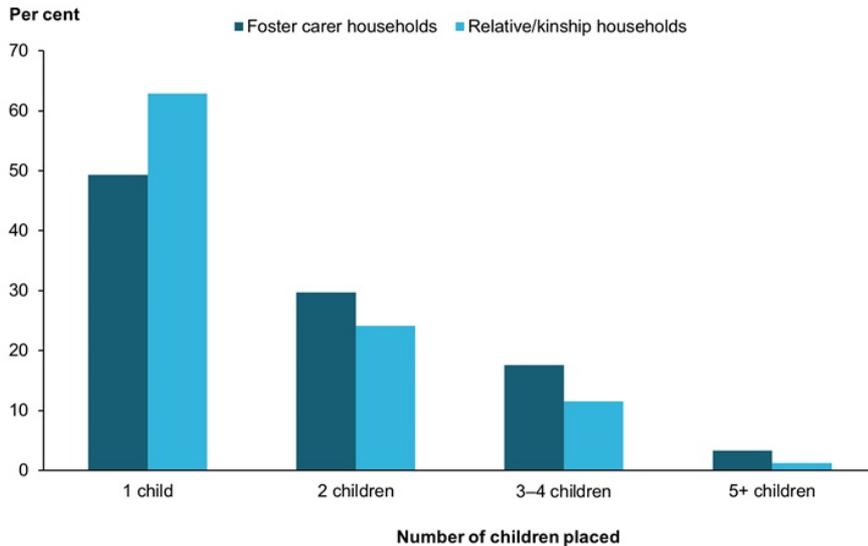
These findings are similar to those for 2019-20 (AIHW 2020). The prevalence of households with multiple child placements might reflect that, in many jurisdictions, priority is given to placing siblings together.

Of the approximately 15,600 relative/kinship carer households with one or more children placed at 30 June 2021:

- most (63%) had one child placed with them, compared with less than half (49%) of foster carer households
- 36% had 2-4 children placed with them
- 1.3% had 5 or more children placed with them (Supplementary table S7.3; Figure 7.2).

Overall, relative/kinship carer households were less likely to have multiple children placed with them than foster carers.

Figure 7.2: Foster and relative/kinship carer households with a placement, by number of children placed, 30 June 2021 (per cent)



Note: Children under third-party parental responsibility orders placed with relative/kinship carers are excluded.

Chart: AIHW.

Sources: Supplementary data tables S7.2 and S7.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 13/04/2022 v6.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Carers

How many households commenced and exited care?

Among jurisdictions with data for both households commencing and exiting care (excluding New South Wales), about 1,300 households commenced foster care and about 1,500 exited foster care in 2020-21 (Table 7.2). There was a net decrease of 205 foster carer households.

In contrast, relative/kinship carer households saw a net increase of about 115 households, with 5,000 commencements and 4,900 exits in 2020-21 (Table 7.2).

This pattern is consistent with carer household commencements and exits in 2019-20 (AIHW 2020) and reflects the difficulties in recruiting and retaining carers (COAG 2009; Commonwealth of Australia 2021) as well as the acknowledgement that relative and kinship carers are the fastest-growing type of carer across Australia (FaHCSIA 2012).

Table 7.2: Households commencing and exiting care, by state or territory, 2020-21
(number)

State or territory	Households commencing foster care	Households exiting foster care	Households commencing relative/kinship care	Households exiting relative/kinship care
NSW	760	n.a.	1,504	n.a.
Vic	315	580	2,961	2,983
Qld	424	409	677	588
WA	188	248	678	741
SA	190	109	457	375
Tas	55	53	89	82
ACT	23	1	67	10
NT	82	83	88	121
Total	2,037	1,483	6,521	4,900

Notes:

1. Excludes respite placements.
2. For jurisdiction-specific footnotes, see Table 7.2 in the *Child protection Australia 2020-21 data tables*.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

References

For a full list of references, go to [References](#).

Last updated 28/04/2022 v14.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Intensive family support services

Key findings

- In 2020-21, about 36,400 children aged less than 18 years commenced intensive family support services.
- For jurisdictions with available data, the majority (70%) of children were living with their parents when they commenced intensive family support services.

What is the role of intensive family support services?

Intensive family support services aim to provide support services to families with varying levels of involvement in the child protection system (Figure 8.1). Families may be referred to these services at any time once they have come into contact with the system.

Figure 8.1: Overview of intensive family support services

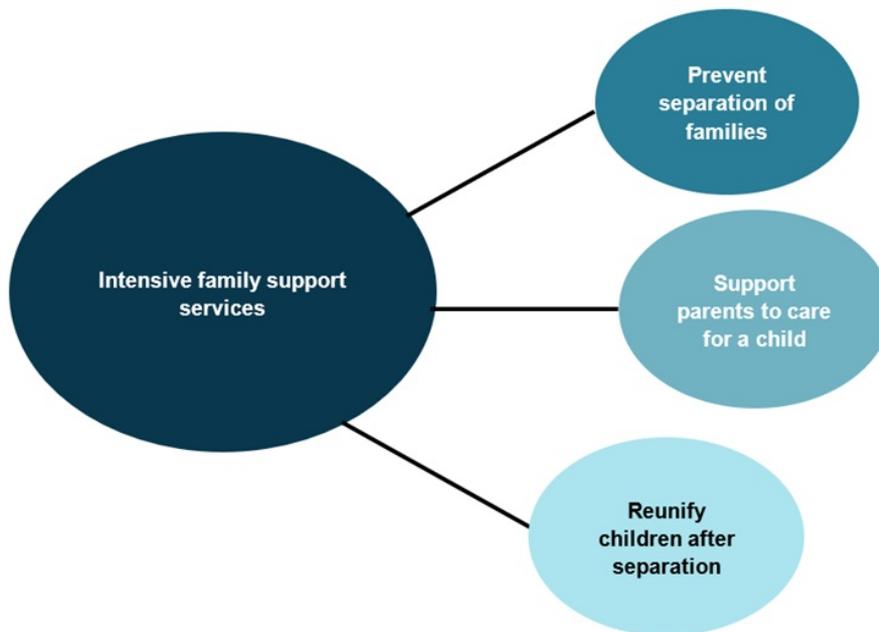


Chart: AIHW.

Box 8.1 describes the criteria for intensive family support services included in this report.

Box 8.1: Data notes for intensive family support services

To be included in the intensive family support services data reported here, outsourced intensive family support services must provide:

- services that explicitly aim to prevent separation or to reunify families
- a variety of services as part of an integrated strategy focusing on improving family functioning and skills, rather than just one type of service, such as emergency or respite care
- intensive services, averaging at least 4 hours of service per week for a specified short-term period (usually less than 180 days).

Generally, referrals will come from the statutory agency, and will have been identified through the child protection process.

Currently, the national data collection is limited to intensive family support services, and does not include other types of family support services that do not meet these criteria.

How many children received intensive family support services?

In 2020-21, about 36,400 children aged less than 18 years commenced intensive family support services (Table 8.1). Of these, 21% were aged under 5.

The majority (70%) of children who commenced an intensive family support service were living with their parents (Supplementary table S8.1). Living arrangement data for intensive family support services excludes New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

Children commencing intensive family support services might also appear in the other child protection statistics presented throughout this report, but the extent of this overlap cannot currently be measured in the national data.

Table 8.1: Children commencing intensive family support services, by age at commencement of service and state or territory, 2020-21 (number)

State or territory	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-17	Unknown	Total
NSW	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11,222
Vic	3,112	2,740	2,730	1,020	0	9,602
Qld	3,226	3,359	3,134	1,038	0	10,757
WA	589	463	356	99	19	1,526
SA	278	192	164	43	1	678
Tas	265	289	277	89	1,015	1,935
ACT	85	69	62	20	0	236
NT	185	115	127	33	0	460
Total	7,740	7,227	6,850	2,342	1,035	36,416

Note: for jurisdiction-specific footnotes, see Table 8.1 in the [Child protection Australia 2020-21 data tables](#).

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2020-21.

How many intensive family support services and providers are there in Australia?

In 2020-21, about 460 intensive family support service providers delivered services in Australia (excluding Northern Territory). Services were delivered across 465 locations (excluding Northern Territory) (unpublished data from the AIHW Child Protection Collection).

Last updated 26/05/2022 v18.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

Technical notes

Care and protection orders

The following rules apply to the counting of admissions, discharges and length of time for care and protection orders:

1. A renewal of an existing order is not counted as an admission. A change to an order is counted as an admission. However, if a new care and protection order is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge of another order (regardless of that type of order), neither an admission nor a discharge are counted.
2. If a child is on multiple care and protection orders/arrangements, all orders/arrangements must be discharged before a discharge is counted.
3. If a child is admitted to, or discharged from, multiple care and protection orders/arrangements, the child is counted for only one admission and/or one discharge for the year.
4. The length of time continuously on an order is counted only for the first order/arrangement from which the child is discharged during the year.
5. If a child is discharged from an order and a new care and protection order/arrangement is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge, the orders are deemed to be consecutive (that is, the length of time on an order will include both orders).
6. Each child is counted for one admission for the year.

Population data

Population estimates for all children aged 0 to 17 years are sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Population estimates for Indigenous children are sourced from Indigenous population projections produced by the ABS. Non-Indigenous population estimates are derived by calculating the difference between the total population and the corresponding estimate from the Indigenous population projections.

The most up to date time series of population estimates from the ABS are used in all trend calculations. This will result in differences to data published in previous *Child Protection Australia* reports.

Population estimates used to calculate rates are available in online supplementary tables P1-P5.

Box 9.1: COVID-19 impact on population estimates

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting Australian Government closure of the international border from 20 March 2020, caused significant disruptions to the usual Australian population trends. This report uses Australian Estimated Residential Population (ERP) estimates that reflect these disruptions.

In the year July 2020 to June 2021, the overall population growth was much smaller than the years prior, and in particular, there was a relatively large decline in the population of Victoria. ABS reporting indicates these were primarily due to net-negative international migration ([National, state and territory population, June 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)).

This change in usual population trends may result in some rates and proportions being greater than in previous years due to decreases in the denominator (population size) of some sub-populations.

Calculation of rates

This report uses both December and June population data, depending on the point of analysis (see [Points of analysis](#)). December population data are used when calculating rates for during the year counts. June population data are used when calculating rates for 30 June counts.

Population rates are calculated by dividing the number of children for a specific measure or group (e.g. children in out-of-home care) by the corresponding population. For example, the rates of children on care and protection orders at June 30 are calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0–17 on care and protection orders at 30 June}}{\text{Estimated resident population of children aged 0–17 at June}} \times 1,000$$

Rate ratio

Rates can be compared using a rate ratio, which is one rate divided by another. Rate ratios should be interpreted with care where there are small denominators or where a large proportion of data is recorded as 'unknown'.

In *Child protection Australia* reporting, rate ratios are mainly used to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates, and measure the level of Indigenous over-representation. Rates are also presented to guide interpretation.

Rate ratios are not calculated where one or both of the rates have fewer than 5 children or young people in the numerator.

Age

Age is always calculated in whole years. For example, a child who was aged 5 years and 9 months is recorded as being aged 5.

Throughout *Child protection Australia*, age is calculated at different points in time for a child, depending on the analysis in question:

- For 30 June analyses, age is calculated as at 30 June.
- For analyses of events occurring during the year, age is calculated at the relevant point in time during the year:
 - For analyses of children who were the subject of a child protection notification or substantiation, age is calculated at the earliest date of notification during the period.
 - For analyses of children who were admitted to, or discharged from, a care and protection order or an out-of-home care placement, age is calculated at the date of first admission and first discharge during the period.
- For analyses of children receiving child protection services, age is calculated at the earliest point of contact or at 1 July of the relevant reporting period if the child was on an ongoing care and protection order, or in an ongoing out-of-home care placement at the beginning of the period.

Average

Averages or means are calculated by summing all the values of interest, and dividing by the total number of observations of interest. In *Child protection Australia*, averages are used in the reporting of the average co-occurrence of abuse and neglect.

Identification of Indigenous status

Children

The practices used to identify and record the Indigenous status of children vary across states and territories. The quality of the data is therefore unknown.

In this collection, children are counted as Indigenous if they are identified as such in the state and territory data collections. Where possible, children whose Indigenous status is recorded as 'unknown' are excluded from the calculations of rates and proportions. So, the counts for Indigenous children are likely to be an underestimate of the number of Indigenous children in the child protection system.

Caregivers

In the out-of-home care data collection, the Indigenous status of caregivers is collected. Carers who are identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are included in the Indigenous category for caregivers. In instances where there is no single caregiver, such as facility-based care, the caregiver will be recorded as Indigenous if the facility is specifically for Indigenous children and/or has Indigenous management. However, in Table S5.12 children are not counted as living with Indigenous caregivers in Indigenous led facility-based care as this is not a preferred placement type under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. If Indigenous children are living in other types of facility-based care, the caregiver are not counted as Indigenous.

Points of analysis

During the year

Each child is counted only once, even if a child had multiple occurrences of the event during the year.

For example, when calculating the number of children who were the subjects of substantiations of child protection notifications during the year, a child will be counted if a notification received during the financial year was substantiated. However, the child will only be counted once, regardless of how many notifications were substantiated for them in the financial year. Where details relating to the substantiation are reported (e.g., type of abuse or neglect, or age of the child) the first substantiated notification is counted.

30 June (at the end of the financial year)

Counts of people at 30 June are calculated by counting each distinct person for whom the event of interest was ongoing at the end of the financial year. Each person is counted only once, even if that person had multiple occurrences of the event ongoing at 30 June.

In instances where a child or young person has multiple child protection orders ongoing at 30 June, the child or young person is counted against the national order type that represented the highest level of intervention.

In instances where a child or young person has multiple living arrangements ongoing at 30 June, the child or young person is counted against the living arrangement type that is considered their usual placement.

For example, when calculating the number of children and young people on a care and protection order at 30 June, a child or young person will be counted if they were on a care and protection order during the reporting period, and the order had not ended, or ended after 30 June. If the child or young person had an ongoing finalised guardianship order and an ongoing interim order at 30 June, they would be counted in the finalised guardianship order category, as this represents the higher level of intervention of the 2 orders.

Trends

Trends are reported as 5-year periods unless specified otherwise. Increases over time in the number or rate of children receiving child protection services or support might relate to changes in the underlying rate of child abuse and neglect, increases in notifications and access to services, or a combination of these factors.

It is standard practice to present 5-year trends in data, as changes in state and territory legislation, policy/practice, and information management systems reduce the ability to accurately compare data over longer periods.

Changes that have an impact on the data are provided as caveats to the data, in the Technical Notes, and in [Appendixes A-C](#).

Socioeconomic area

Child protection Australia reporting uses the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), developed by the ABS to analyse socioeconomic status (ABS 2018b).

The SEIFA comprises 4 indexes that are created using information from the Census of Population and Housing. These indexes are:

1. the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage
2. the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage
3. the Index of Economic Resources
4. the Index of Education and Occupation.

The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage is used to compare the average level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. It is the SEIFA index used in this report, ranking geographical areas on a continuum from 'most disadvantaged' to 'least disadvantaged' using a combination of income, education, employment, occupation, housing, and other Census variables (ABS 2018b).

The AIHW uses postcode data to match SEIFA information to child protection data and to calculate population quintiles. The population datasets used to calculate the quintiles for SEIFA were based on regional population data the ABS published in 2018 (ABS 2020).

For more information on SEIFA refer to *Socio-economic indexes for areas: getting a handle on individual diversity within areas*. ABS cat. no. 1351.0.55.036 (ABS 2011).

Remoteness area

Child protection Australia reports use the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure developed by the ABS to analyse the remoteness of a child's usual place of residence at the time of notification, and the remoteness of a child's living arrangement (ABS 2018a).

The AIHW uses SA2 or postcodes to match remoteness information to child protection data. These data include SA2 / postcode at notification and SA2 / postcode of living arrangement. Records with invalid, missing, or unknown SA2's and or postcodes are excluded from the analysis (see Supplementary tables S3.7 and S5.9). Some SA2's and postcodes do not map to single Remoteness Areas. For these SA2's and postcodes, the data are weighted according to how the population is distributed across the SA2 / postcode and how this overlaps with the relevant Remoteness Area/s. Some children and young people might appear in remoteness areas for which there is no population within that state or territory. This is due to records whose SA2 / postcode is in a different state or territory to the one in which they received a notification, or were in out-of-home care.

For more information on the Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure refer to *Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure*. ABS cat. no. 1270.0.55.005

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2011) *Socio-economic indexes for areas: getting a handle on individual diversity within areas*, ABS website, accessed 25 November 2021.

ABS (2018a) *Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): volume 5 - Remoteness Structure*, ABS Website, accessed 25 November 2021.

ABS (2018b) *Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia, 2016*, ABS Website, accessed 25 November 2021.

ABS (2020) *Regional population by age and sex, Australia, 2020*. ABS website, accessed 25 November 2021.

Last updated 26/04/2022 v34.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Technical notes

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CP NMDS	Child Protection National Minimum Data Set
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Last updated 20/04/2022 v3.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Technical notes

Symbols

0	zero
. .	not applicable
<	less than
>	greater than
n.a.	not available
n.p.	not publishable because of small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data

Last updated 20/04/2022 v2.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 

References

Understanding child protection

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2021) [National framework for protecting Australia's children indicators](#). Catalogue number CWS 62, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 23 November 2021.

Bromfield L & Holzer P (2008) [A national approach for child protection: project report](#). Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) (2021) [Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031](#). DSS, Australian Government, accessed 22 December 2021.

SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) (2018) [Understanding and applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: a resource for legislation, policy, and program development](#). SNAICC, accessed 6 October 2021.

Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2022) [Report on government services 2021 - Section 16: Child protection services](#). Productivity Commission, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

UN (United Nations) General Assembly (1989) [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). UN General Assembly, accessed 5 October 2021.

UNICEF (The United Nations Children's Fund) (2021) [Child Protection Strategy 2021-2030](#). The United Nations Children's Fund, accessed 6 October 2021.

WHO (World Health Organization) (2020) [Child maltreatment](#). WHO website, accessed 6 October 2021.

Children receiving child protection services

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2018) [Child protection Australia 2016-17](#). *Child Welfare Series 68*, catalogue number CWS 63, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

AIHW (2019) [Child protection Australia 2017-18](#). *Child Welfare Series 70*, catalogue number CWS 65, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

AIHW (2020) [Child protection Australia 2018-19](#). *Child Welfare Series 72*, catalogue number CWS 74, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

AIHW (2021) [Child protection Australia 2019-20](#). *Child Welfare Series 74*, catalogue number CWS 78, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) (2021) [Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031](#). DSS, Australian Government, accessed 22 December 2021.

Families Australia (2020) [Beyond 2020: Towards a Successor Plan for the National Framework for Protection Australia's Children 2009-2020 - Final report on National Consultations by Families Australia](#). report to the Australian Government Department of Social Services, Families Australia.

Notifications, investigations and substantiations

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2020) [Recorded crime - Victims](#). ABS website, accessed 6 October 2021.

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2014) [Indigenous child safety](#). catalogue number IHW 127, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) (1997) [Bringing them home: Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families](#). HREOC, accessed 6 October 2021.

Out-of-home care

AIFS (Australian Institute of Family Studies), Chapin Hall (Centre for Children University of Chicago) & NSW FACS (New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services) (2015) [Wave 1 Baseline Statistical Report: Summary Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study - Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in NSW](#). NSW FACS, New South Wales Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2021) [The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicators](#). catalogue number CWS 84, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 7 February 2022.

Cashmore J (2011) The link between child maltreatment and adolescent offending: systems neglect of adolescents. *Family Matters*, 89:31-41.

DHHS (Victorian Department of Health and Human Services) (2019) Strong Carers, Stronger Children: supporting kinship, foster and permanent carers to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people in care. Victoria DHHS, Victorian Government, accessed 7 October 2021.

Permanency outcomes

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2016) Permanency planning in child protection: a review of current concepts and available data 2016. *Child Welfare Series* 64, catalogue number CWS 58, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 7 October 2021.

Osmond J and Tilbury C (2012) Permanency planning concepts. *Children Australia* 37:100-107.

Prentice, the Hon. J (1 June 2018) Community Services Ministers' Meeting Communiqué: National Permanency Work Plan for children and young people [media release], Australian Government, accessed 13 February 2020,

Seselja, the Hon. Z (25 August 2017) Community Services Ministers' Meeting communique: Permanency reform for children and young people [media release], Australian Government, accessed 12 January 2018.

Carers

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2021) Child protection Australia 2019-20. *Child Welfare Series* 74, catalogue number CWS 78, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 6 October 2021.

COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009) Protecting children is everyone's business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. COAG, Australian Government, accessed 7 October 2021.

Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) (2021) Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031. DSS, Australian Government, accessed 22 December 2021.

FaHCSIA (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (2012) Protecting children is everyone's business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020-Second Action Plan 2012-2015. FaHCSIA, Australian Government, accessed 7 October 2021.

Last updated 26/04/2022 v15.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Notes

Data quality statement

[Child Protection National Minimum Dataset, 2020-21 Data Quality Statement](#)

Last updated 20/04/2022 v3.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Data

Last updated 13/01/2022 v1.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Report editions

This release

Child protection Australia 2020-21 | 15 Jun 2022

Previous releases

- Child protection Australia 2019-20 |
Publication | 18 May 2021
- Child protection Australia 2018-19 |
Publication | 18 Mar 2020
- Child protection Australia 2017-18 |
Publication | 08 Mar 2019
- Child protection Australia 2016-17 |
Publication | 09 Mar 2018
- Child protection Australia 2015-16 |
Publication | 16 Mar 2017
- Child protection Australia 2014-15 |
Publication | 21 Apr 2016
- Child protection Australia 2013-14 |
Publication | 08 May 2015
- Child protection Australia 2012-13 |
Publication | 25 Jul 2014
- Child protection Australia 2011-12 |
Publication | 08 Mar 2013
- Child protection Australia 2010-11 |
Publication | 20 Jan 2012
- Child protection Australia 2009-10 |
Publication | 21 Jan 2011
- Child protection Australia 2008-09 |
Publication | 21 Jan 2010
- Child protection Australia 2007-08 |
Publication | 21 Jan 2009
- Child protection Australia 2006-07 |
Publication | 23 Jan 2008
- Child protection Australia 2005-06 |
Publication | 25 Jan 2007
- Child protection Australia 2004-05 |
Publication | 18 Jan 2006
- Child protection Australia 2003-04 |
Publication | 20 Jan 2005
- Child protection Australia 2002-03 |
Publication | 22 Jan 2004
- Child protection Australia 2001-02 |
Publication | 02 Apr 2003
- Child protection Australia 2000-01 |
Publication | 04 Apr 2002
- Child protection Australia 1999-00 |
Publication | 10 May 2001
- Child protection Australia 1998-99 |
Publication | 18 May 2000
- Child protection Australia 1997-98 |
Publication | 27 Aug 1999
- Child protection Australia 1996-97 |
Publication | 28 Aug 1998

- Child abuse and neglect Australia 1995-96 |
Publication | 30 Jun 1997
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1994-95 |
Publication | 01 Apr 1995
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1993-94 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1995
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1992-93 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1994
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1991-92 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1993
 - Child abuse and neglect Australia 1990-91 |
Publication | 01 Aug 1992
-

Last updated 13/01/2022 v1.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 



Related material

Resources

Related topics

- [Adoptions](#)
 - [Children & youth](#)
-

Last updated 13/01/2022 v1.0

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022 