

3.19 Out-of-home care

Why this measure is included

Out-of-home care refers to a range of short or long-term care options for children and young people aged less than 18 years who are unable to live with their families for a variety of reasons, usually due to child abuse and/or neglect. The number and rate of children in out-of-home care in Western Australia (WA) has been increasing consistently since 1997.

The out-of-home care experience can be a positive experience for many children and young people. However, studies have shown that children and young people in out-of-home care experience poorer outcomes on average than those in the general population, including significantly poorer mental health outcomes for some²⁵⁷ and a vulnerability to homelessness.²⁵⁸ Schooling to Year 12 level or equivalent is also less likely to be completed, and this group is more likely to be unemployed, have contact with the youth justice system and experience alcohol and drug use problems.^{259 260 261} A significant number of children and young people in care experience complex psychological and behavioural problems, which have been contributed to by the abuse and trauma experienced by children prior to coming into care.²⁶²

Table 3.67: Children and young people in out-of-home care: number and rate per 1,000 population 0 to 17 years, states and territories, 30 June 2006 to 30 June 2012

	WA		Australia	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
2006	1,968	4.0	25,454	5.3
2007	2,371	4.7	28,379	5.8
2008	2,546	5.0	31,166	6.3
2009	2,682	5.1	34,069	6.7
2010	2,737	5.1	35,895	7.0
2011	3,120	5.7	37,648	7.3
2012	3,400	6.1	39,621	7.7

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child Protection Australia*, 2006–12 [series]

Table 3.68: Children and young people in out-of-home care: rate per 1,000 population 0 to 17 years, by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, states and territories, 30 June 2012

	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	All children and young people (a)	Rate ratio Aboriginal / non-Aboriginal (b)
WA	51.6	3.4	6.1	15.3
NSW	83.4	7.1	10.5	11.7
Vic	66.4	4.2	5.1	15.8
Qld	42.2	4.9	7.4	8.7
SA	55.0	5.4	7.2	10.2
Tas	25.1	7.4	8.7	3.4
ACT	68.0	5.3	7.0	12.8
NT	20.7	3.7	11.2	5.7
Australia	55.1	5.4	7.7	10.3

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

- (a) 'All children and young people' includes children and young people whose Aboriginal status was unknown.
- (b) Rate ratios are calculated by dividing the un-rounded rate of Aboriginal children who were in out-of-home care by the un-rounded rate of non-Aboriginal children who were in out-of-home care. The resulting number is a measure of how many Aboriginal children were in out-of-home care for every one non-Aboriginal child who was in out-of-home care.

Table 3.69: Aboriginal children in out-of-home care: number and in per cent, by type of carer, Western Australia and Australia, as at 30 June 2012

Relationship	WA		Australia	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Relatives/kin or other Aboriginal caregivers				
Aboriginal relative/kin	670	42.5	5,047	38.2
Other Aboriginal caregiver	231	14.6	2,169	16.4
Other relative/kin	193	12.2	1,866	14.1
Total placed with relatives/kin or other Aboriginal caregivers	1,094	69.3	9,082	68.8
Total not placed with relatives/kin or other Aboriginal caregivers	484	30.7	4,122	31.2
Total	1,578	100.0	13,204	100.0

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

Note: This table does not include Aboriginal children who were living independently or whose living arrangements were unknown.

Table 3.70: Children in out-of-home care, by type of placement, Western Australia and Australia, as at 30 June 2012

Type of Placement	WA		Australia	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Home-based care				
Foster care (a)	1,386	40.8	17,274	43.6
Relatives/kin (a)	1,465	43.1	18,515	46.7
Other home-based care	0	0.0	961	2.4
Total home-based care	2,851	83.9	36,750	92.8
Residential care	150	4.4	2,042	5.2
Family group homes	170	5.0	272	0.7
Other/unknown (b)	229	6.7	557	1.4
Total	3,400	100.0	39,621	100.0

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

- (a) Where a child is placed with a relative who is also fully registered to provide foster care for other children, they are counted in the foster care category for Western Australia.
- (b) 'Other/unknown' includes 'Independent living'.

What is this measure?

This measure considers the number of children and young people who are in various forms of out-of-home care in WA, other jurisdictions and Australia overall. Out-of-home care is defined as overnight care for children aged 0 to 17 years, where the state or territory makes a financial payment or where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer.²⁶³

All data for this measure is drawn from state and territory child protection administrative data sets that are collated, analysed and published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in their annual publication *Child Protection Australia*.

The differences between states and territories in legislation, policies and practices in relation to out-of-home care should be taken into account when interpreting the data for this measure. A description of the legislative and regulatory position of each state and territory is available in the *Child Protection Australia* series of reports.²⁶⁴

It should be noted that WA implemented a new client information system in March 2010 and was unable to report data for the 2009–10 financial year. Data for the period 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2010 was used as a proxy for 2009–2010 data. Data as at 31 December 2010 was used as a proxy for data at 30 June 2010.

Commentary

At 30 June 2012 there were 3,400 children in out-of-home care in WA. This equals a rate of 6.1 per 1,000 children. The rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2012 was higher than at 30 June 2011 in WA (5.7) and in all other jurisdictions.²⁶⁵ The rate was also higher than the rate published in edition one of this report for 30 June 2010 (5.1). The national rate at 30 June 2012 was 7.7 (up from 7.3 in 2011 and 7.0 in 2010) (Table 3.67).

In WA and nationally, the rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June has increased each year since 1997 when the rate was 2.2 per 1,000 children in WA and 3.0 nationally. Between 1997 and 2012, the number of children in out-of-home care in WA has more than tripled from 1,050 in 1997 to 3,400 children in 2012 (Table 3.67).

In all jurisdictions in 2011–12, the rate of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care was higher than for non-Aboriginal children and young people.²⁶⁶ In WA, the rate for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care was 51.6 per 1,000 children – that is more than 15 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children. Nationally, the rate was 55.1 per 1,000 which is 10 times the rate for non-Aboriginal children Australia-wide (Table 3.68).

Aboriginal children represented 46 per cent of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2012. The Department for Child Protection and Family Support's latest annual report indicates that at 30 June 2013 nearly one-half (49%) of children in care were Aboriginal.²⁶⁷

The data in Table 3.69 shows that nearly 70 per cent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in WA were placed with relatives or other Aboriginal caregivers. This result is a reflection of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.²⁶⁸ The national percentage is very similar at 68.8 per cent of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care placed with relatives or other Aboriginal caregivers (Table 3.69).

Table 3.70 shows that 83.9 per cent of all children and young people in out-of-home care in WA at 30 June 2012 were in home-based care – 43.1 per cent in relative/kinship care and 40.8 per cent in foster care. The remaining 16.1 per cent of children and young people were living in either residential care (4.4%), family group homes (5.0%) or in other types of funded placements (6.8%). Nationally, 92.8 per cent of children in out-of-home care were in home-based care and 7.2 per cent in other types of funded placements including residential care (5.2%). The results for both WA and Australia follow a similar pattern to that observed in previous years²⁶⁹ (Table 3.70).

Strategies

Better Care, Better Services: Standards for children and young people in protection and care, Government of Western Australia (released 2007)

These nine standards were developed by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) and the non-government sector. They aim to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in care and are monitored by CPFS. Further information is available at www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Standards%20Monitoring%20Unit/Better%20Care%20Better%20Services%20-%20booklet.pdf

Permanency Planning Policy (2012), Government of Western Australia

This policy addresses the issue of placement instability and 'drift' in care by requiring that timely consideration be given to whether children and young people in care can be reunified with their parent/s, or whether long-term out-of-home care needs to be achieved. Further information is available at www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/PoliciesandFrameworks.aspx

Foster Care Partnership Policy and Foster Care Partnership: Practice Framework – 2nd edition 2012, Government of Western Australia

The Foster Care Partnership forms the foundation for the Department for Child Protection and Family Support approach to foster care. Partnership means that child protection workers and foster carers work together to meet the needs of the child. Further information is available at www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/PoliciesandFrameworks.aspx

Viewpoint, Government of Western Australia (released 2011)

Viewpoint is a computer assisted self-interviewing program designed to allow children and young people in out-of-home care to more actively participate in decisions made about their care. Viewpoint can be used to allow children and young people to have more direct involvement in planning for leaving care. The program was rolled out in 2011 and is now available to all WA children and young people in out-of-home care. Further information is available at manuals.dcp.wa.gov.au/manuals/cpm/Pages/04ViewpointandCarePlans-helpingchildrenincaretohavetheirsay.aspx

Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020, Council of Australian Governments

This framework comprises a series of high-level, three-year plans to deliver and monitor strategies to sustain a substantial reduction in child abuse and neglect. The framework is available at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business



National Standards for Out of Home Care, Commonwealth Government (released 2011)

These standards seek to drive improvements in the quality of care so children and young people in care have the same opportunities as other children and young people to reach their potential in all the key areas of well-being. A summary is available at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/an-outline-of-national-standards-for-out-of-home-care-2011

Want to know more?

Data on out-of-home care

A national child protection report that provides across-jurisdictional data, including data on out-of-home care, is produced annually and available on the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website at www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129542755

Research, reports and articles

Research and related articles on out-of-home care are available from Child Family Community Australia www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/

Other information

Further information on out-of-home care is available on the Department for Child Protection and Family Support website www.dcp.wa.gov.au

The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) annual report on the National Framework for protecting Australia's Children and the annual Report on Government Services (ROGS) both include relevant information this topic. The COAG report is available at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business/protecting-children-is-everyone-s-business-national-framework-for-protecting-australia-s-children-2009-2020-annual-report-2011-12

The ROGS 2014 is available at www.pc.gov.au/gsp/rogs

Additional tables

Table 3.71: Children in out-of-home care: Number and in per cent, by age group, Western Australia and Australia, 2011–12

	WA		Australia	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Under 1 year	145	4.3	1,185	3.0
1 to 4 years	789	23.2	7,975	20.1
5 to 9 years	1,106	32.5	12,528	31.6
10 to 14 years	939	27.6	12,047	30.4
15 to 17 years	421	12.4	5,885	14.9
0 to 17 years (a)	3,400	100.0	39,621	100.0

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Child Protection Australia: 2011–12*

(a) Total for Australia includes one child whose age was unknown.