



**Policy Position Priorities**

# **Child Protection**

**2025**



**Commissioner for Children and Young People**  
Western Australia

## Acknowledgment of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands across Western Australia and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located.

She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities of all Aboriginal peoples. The Commissioner and her team also pay their respects to Elders, past and present and emerging leaders. The Commissioner and her team recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

## A note about language

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, although similarities do exist.

## Who is the Commissioner for Children and Young People?

Jacqueline McGowan-Jones is the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia (WA). She has an important statutory role to monitor and review written laws, draft laws, policies, practices, and services affecting the wellbeing of children and young people under eighteen. The Commissioner has a duty to regularly consult with children and young people about issues that affect them and to promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives. She also has responsibility to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children and young people in their work.

More information about the Commissioner and the work of her office is available from:  
[ccyp.wa.gov.au](http://ccyp.wa.gov.au).

## Suggested citation

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## Content note

This priority paper covers issues that may be distressing for some readers.  
Please read with care.

If any of the topics discussed raise issues for you, you may wish to contact:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **13YARN:** 13 92 76
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 551 800
- **Butterfly Foundation National Eating Disorders Helpline:** 1800 33 4673
- **QLife:** 1800 184 527





## Message from the Commissioner

Since commencing as the Commissioner for Children and Young People in January 2022, my team and I have undertaken extensive consultation with over 11,000 children and young people in Western Australia (WA).

Their voices are critical in informing the work of my office. In 2023, these discussions resulted in the development of Policy Position Statements for Health and Mental Health, Education, Child Protection and Youth Justice. Discussion Papers were then developed and stakeholders (children and young people; government and non-governments; individuals) were also asked to provide submissions in relation to any evidence suggestions or concerns noted.

Following the extensive engagement, including focus groups with children and young people and a review of the 42 submissions received, we evaluated both the Position Statements and Policy Priorities.


I am pleased to provide you with our updated Policy Position Statements and Priorities.

I urge you all to consider these evidence-informed documents when creating policies, programs and services that are aimed at supporting WA children and young people to live in a better world where their voices and rights are valued and respected.



**Thank you!**

**to all of the children  
and young people who  
shared their voices.**





## Priorities

The Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA) establishes that the Commissioner's paramount concern must be the best interests of children and young people in WA. The Commissioner undertakes research with children and young people to ensure their voices inform the activities and priorities of the Commissioner.

In line with national and international evidence, the Commissioner advocates for child protection to be focused on the following six priorities:

### 1 Earlier intervention and family support strategies

Early intervention and prevention services are essential in reducing child protection involvement by addressing the root causes of family crises before they escalate.<sup>i</sup> Poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, and health concerns place children and families at significant risk, making it critical to allocate resources to programs that provide timely and effective support.

A well-resourced early intervention system must include improved access to healthcare and mental health services, as well as enhanced availability of counselling, support groups, and safe housing options for victims of family and domestic violence.<sup>ii</sup> Families facing financial hardship need targeted assistance to prevent crises that could lead to child protection involvement. Holistic, integrated services that address both immediate needs and long-term stability are crucial.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, early intervention must be culturally safe, community-led, and focused on empowerment. Programs should be tailored to meet their specific needs, ensuring that cultural identity, kinship connections, and self-determination are central to service delivery. Similarly, cooperation between agencies, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) community groups, is necessary to provide comprehensive, wraparound support for families.

By investing in proactive, family-centred strategies, we can strengthen protective factors, reduce risks, and ultimately create safer, more stable environments where children can thrive.

### 2 Stability and connection planning

Ensuring stability and connection is essential in preventing child protection interventions by addressing the underlying factors that contribute to family instability.<sup>iii</sup> Stable care arrangements allow children to receive consistent care, form secure attachments, and maintain educational continuity, reducing the risk of neglect and abuse.<sup>iv</sup> Stability planning should prioritise minimising disruptions, ensuring children remain in familiar environments that support their emotional, social, physical, cultural and academic development.





Connection planning is equally important in preserving family and community ties, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CaLD children and young people. Maintaining cultural connections, kinship care arrangements, and engagement with community groups helps strengthen identity and belonging. Culturally competent child protection services must integrate traditional practices and values into care plans to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CaLD children remain connected to their heritage.

Strengthening family and community support networks also plays a key role in reducing stress and preventing crises, ultimately reducing the need for child protection interventions.<sup>v</sup> Programs that support extended family involvement, mental health services, and parenting resources help build resilience and provide families with the tools they need to navigate challenges. By prioritising stability and connection, child protection systems can foster safer, more nurturing environments where children and families can thrive.

### **Improving health outcomes**

Good health outcomes are essential for children in out-of-home care (OOHC), as they form the foundation for both immediate wellbeing and long-term success. Regular health screenings, timely medical interventions, and access to immunisations and nutritional support are crucial in preventing chronic conditions and safeguarding physical health.<sup>vi</sup> Ensuring children in OOHC receive consistent, high-quality healthcare reduces the risk of long-term health disparities and enhances their overall development.

Equally important is addressing mental health needs, as many children in OOHC have experienced significant trauma. Immediate and ongoing access to trauma-informed mental health services is necessary to support emotional resilience and behavioural development. Child removal itself is a traumatic experience, and services must be equipped to provide culturally appropriate, therapeutic care that acknowledges this reality.<sup>vii</sup>

Beyond healthcare, stable and supportive environments play a critical role in fostering healthy cognitive and emotional development. Investing in health-focused initiatives that promote stability, encourage strong relationships, and support emotional growth is key to improving overall outcomes. Additionally, preparing children in OOHC for successful transitions into adulthood through education, vocational training, and life skills development ensures they have the tools to build independent, fulfilling lives. By prioritising both physical and mental health, we not only enhance immediate wellbeing but also break cycles of disadvantage and create pathways for a brighter future.



## 4

### **Support for out-of-home care (OOHC) leavers**

Supporting young people transitioning out of OOHC is crucial for their successful integration into independent adulthood. Leaving care planning should commence no later than age 15, allowing time to explore housing, employment, education, life skills training, and obtain essential documentation such as a birth certificate, driver's license and Medicare card. A well-structured transition plan ensures that young people are equipped with the tools and resources necessary to navigate adulthood confidently.

Life skills programs tailored to OOHC leavers should be introduced well before they exit care, focusing on financial management, cooking, and housing searches to help them develop independence. Access to targeted education and employment resources is essential, providing guidance on career pathways, vocational training, and higher education opportunities. Additionally, stable housing options, financial assistance, and transitional support must be available to prevent homelessness and financial insecurity.

Addressing the emotional and mental health needs of OOHC leavers is equally vital. Ongoing access to counselling, mental health services, and peer support groups helps young people navigate the challenges of adulthood while building resilience and emotional wellbeing. Establishing mentorship programs and community support networks can provide invaluable guidance, practical advice, and a sense of belonging. Finally, ensuring continued access to comprehensive healthcare, including regular medical check-ups and mental health care, is fundamental to promoting long-term stability and success.

By prioritising early and structured transition out-of-care planning, holistic support systems, and accessible resources, we can help break cycles of disadvantage and improve the long-term educational, employment, and health outcomes for young people leaving OOHC.

## 5

### **Support for Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children (CaLD) in out-of-home care (OOHC)**

Ensuring that Aboriginal and CaLD children in OOHC receive culturally competent and stable care is essential for their long-term wellbeing. Maintaining strong connections to cultural identity, language, and community is vital for fostering a sense of belonging and resilience. Cultural competence in care is not just about acknowledging heritage, it is a necessary foundation for emotional and psychological wellbeing, reducing trauma, strengthening self-identity, and preventing placement instability.



Care providers must be trained in cultural competence to incorporate cultural traditions, language, and community connections into daily care routines. This includes active efforts to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) and implementing cultural plans that ensure children remain connected to their extended families, communities, and cultural groups. Collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) is essential to ensure that placements are culturally appropriate, and that care aligns with the child's identity and values.

Access to culturally sensitive mental health services is also critical. Trauma must be addressed in a way that respects cultural perspectives, with therapists trained in culturally appropriate practices providing support that aligns with the child's background. Stable housing and minimising placement disruptions are equally important, as frequent moves can undermine a child's sense of stability and identity. To support long-term success, kinship care arrangements should be prioritised wherever possible, ensuring that children maintain strong family and community ties. Partnerships with community organisations can further provide children with resources, mentoring, and opportunities to engage with their cultural heritage.

By embedding culturally informed practices, stable placements, and trauma-responsive support, we can ensure that Aboriginal and CaLD children in OOHHC grow up with a strong sense of identity, resilience, and community connection, laying the foundation for their long-term stability and success.

## 6

### **Address the cross-over from child protection to youth justice**

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage requires targeted support for children who transition from child protection to youth justice.<sup>viii</sup> Many of these children experience significant trauma, instability, and systemic neglect, leading to behaviours that result in criminal justice involvement. Without early intervention and trauma-informed care, these children are at risk of further criminalisation, recidivism, and long-term disadvantage.

To prevent this trajectory, holistic support systems must address underlying issues such as mental health challenges, educational disengagement, poverty, and family instability. Stable relationships with caregivers, mentors, and community supports provide emotional security and encourage positive development. Collaboration between child protection and youth justice systems is essential to create a coordinated approach that prioritises rehabilitation over punitive measures.

Education and vocational training play a critical role in preventing justice involvement. Children in OOHHC, including those involved with the Department of Justice, must have full access to Vocational Education and Training (VET) under the *Vocational Education and Training Act 1996* (WA).<sup>ix</sup> Programs such as School-Based Traineeships, Pre-Apprenticeships, and VET Delivered to Secondary Students should contribute to the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE), providing pathways to stable employment and financial independence.





A data-driven approach is essential to track intervention outcomes and refine programs based on evolving needs. By prioritising trauma-informed care, education, and integrated support systems, we can prevent the criminalisation of vulnerable children and ensure they receive the opportunities they need to thrive.



## **Independent advocacy for children and young people in the child protection system**

Independent advocacy is essential to ensuring that children and young people in the child protection system have their voices heard, their rights protected, and their wellbeing prioritised.<sup>x</sup> Advocates play a critical role in empowering children, helping them articulate their views and ensuring their perspectives inform decision-making. Unlike child protection workers, independent advocates act solely in the child's best interests, safeguarding their legal rights and navigating complex systems without conflicts of interest.<sup>xi</sup>

Children and young people have expressed the need for clear and accessible complaints and feedback channels within the child protection system, designed with input from those with lived experience. Effective advocacy also requires transparent oversight, ensuring that advocacy services remain separate from the agencies responsible for child protection to avoid conflicts of interest.

Legal representation is a crucial element of independent advocacy. Children and young people must have access to specialist lawyers who can uphold their rights and provide legal support when needed. To strengthen advocacy, consistent, well-resourced services must be available across all regions, ensuring that no child or young person navigates the system alone.

To be effective, advocacy services must be continuously monitored and evaluated using direct feedback from children and young people. Ongoing training for advocates in child development, trauma-informed care, and legal protections will enhance their ability to support children effectively. Long-term, stable advocacy relationships foster trust and allow advocates to develop a deep understanding of each child's unique needs.

By embedding independent advocacy into all decision-making processes and ensuring consistent and accessible legal support, the child protection system can become more transparent, accountable, and child-focused, leading to better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.



## References

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- <sup>iii</sup> NSPCC Learning, *Early Help and Early Intervention*, last updated 19 December 2023, accessed 3 March 2024, [ICA Taskforce, Infant, Child and Adolescent \(ICA\) Taskforce Implementation Program Eating Disorders: A Model of Care, Government of Western Australia, 1 December 2022, accessed 2 January 2024.](#)
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- <sup>v</sup> N Asif, C Breen and R Wells, 'Influence of placement stability on developmental outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care: Findings from the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 2024, 149:106145.
- <sup>vi</sup> D Nathanson, G Lee and D Tzioumi, 'Children in out-of-home care: Does routine health screening improve outcomes?', *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, 2009, 45(11):665–669.
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- <sup>viii</sup> NSPCC Learning, *Early Help and Early Intervention*, last updated 19 December 2023, accessed 3 March 2024, [NSPCC Learning, Early Help and Early Intervention, last updated 19 December 2023, accessed 3 March 2024, Mental Health Act 2014 \(WA\).](#)
- <sup>ix</sup> *Vocational Education and Training Act 1996 (WA)*.
- <sup>x</sup> E Munro, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A Child-Centred System* (Vol. 8062), The Stationery Office, 2011.
- <sup>xi</sup> C Maylea, L Bashfield, S Thomas, B Kuyini, K Fitt and R Buchanan, 2023. Advocacy as a human rights enabler for parents in the child protection system. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 17(3):275–294.

