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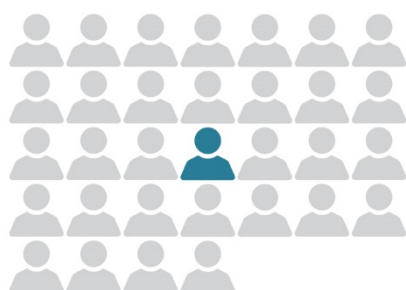
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Summary

Each year, around 3% of all children aged 0–17 are assisted by Australia’s child protection systems. 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. 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, such as with a relative or foster carer.

This report presents statistics on state and territory child protection and family support services, and selected characteristics of children receiving these services. This includes statistics for 2019–20, and trends over the 5-year period from 2015–16 to 2019–20.

1 in 32 children aged 0–17 received child protection services in 2019–20



174,700 children received child protection services in 2019–20. More than half (57%) of these children were the subject of an investigation only, and were not subsequently placed on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care. A small proportion (7%) of children were involved in all 3 components of the system.

67% of children receiving child protection services were repeat clients—that is, the children had previously been involved with the child protection system.

Emotional abuse was the most common type of abuse or neglect



Emotional abuse (54%) was the most common type of abuse or neglect substantiated through investigations in 2019–20. This was followed by neglect (22%), physical abuse (14%), and sexual abuse (9%). A higher proportion of girls (13%) were subject to sexual abuse than boys (6%), while boys had slightly higher percentages of substantiations for neglect and physical abuse.

Children from remote areas had the highest rates of substantiation



Children from *Very remote* areas had the highest rates of substantiation (24 per 1,000 children) and were more than 3 times as likely as children from *Major cities* (7 per 1,000 children) to be the subject of a substantiation in 2019–20.

Almost 46,000 children were in out-of-home care



At 30 June 2020, of the approximately 46,000 children in out-of-home care, 92% were in home-based care. Most of the children in out-of-home care (94%) were on care and protection orders and 67% had been continuously in out-of-home care for 2 years or more.

Trends over time for children in out-of-home care

The number of children in out-of-home care rose by 7% between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2020 (from 43,100 to 46,000). During this time the rate of children in out-of-home care was relatively steady at 8 per 1,000 children.

Trends for children in out-of-home care have been affected by varying definitions over time. From 2018–19, all jurisdictions report out-of-home care data according to a national definition and time series analyses in this report have been back cast to 2016–17. Out-of-home care data in this report should not be compared with data published prior to *Child protection Australia 2018–19*.

Over 30,600 children had been in out-of-home care for 2 years or more



At 30 June 2020, of the approximately 30,600 children in long-term (2 years or more) out-of-home care, 82% were on long-term guardianship orders and in either relative/kinship care (11,200) or foster care (11,300).

Of the children in long-term out-of-home care, 2 in 5 (42%) were Indigenous.

Almost 6,700 children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome



Of the 6,700 children exiting to a permanency outcome during 2019–20, around 5,300 were reunified with family (19% of children in out-of-home care for whom reunification was a possibility), 1,200 were placed in a third-party parental care arrangement (2% of children in out-of-home care) and 162 were adopted (less than 1% of children in out-of-home care).

1 in 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children received child protection services



Indigenous children continue to be over-represented among children receiving child protection services, including for substantiated child abuse and neglect, children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care.

In 2019–20, 55,300 Indigenous children received child protection services, a rate of 166 per 1,000 Indigenous children—an increase from 151 per 1,000 in 2016–17.

14,300 Indigenous children were the subject of a substantiation in 2019–20. The most common type of substantiated abuse for Indigenous children was emotional abuse (47%) followed by neglect (32%).

At 30 June 2020, 23,300 Indigenous children were on care and protection orders. Of these children, 68% (15,900) were on guardianship or custody orders.

1 in 18 Indigenous children (around 18,900) were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020, almost two-thirds (63%) of whom were living with relatives, kin or other Indigenous caregivers.

Over 4 in 5 Indigenous children (84%) who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome in 2018–19 did not return to care within 12 months.

30 years of child protection reporting at the AIHW

The AIHW has been the authoritative source of national child protection data and reporting since 1991, providing valuable insights into child safety and child protection services.

The AIHW works with state and territory child protection departments to manage and improve the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS) and other data that contribute to *Child protection Australia* reports to best inform policymakers, service providers, researchers and the public.

Key milestones

Year	Milestone for national child protection data and reporting
1991	Child protection data provided to the AIHW by state and territory departments for the first time. AIHW releases the first 2 national reports on child protection data: <i>Child abuse and neglect Australia 1990–91</i> and <i>Children under care and protection orders 1990–91</i> .
1992	AIHW contributes child protection data from Australia for inclusion in the first edition of <i>World Perspectives of Child Abuse</i> published by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.
1995	AIHW provides child protection data for inclusion in the first <i>Report on Government Services</i> .
1998	National data on child abuse and neglect, children on care and protection orders and children in out-of-home care are brought together for the first time in <i>Child protection Australia 1996–97</i> .
1999	AIHW releases an extensive report on the <i>Comparability of child protection data</i> .
2010	AIHW child protection data collection is used to support reporting against the <i>National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020</i> in the first annual report. Data on foster carers are included in <i>Child protection Australia 2009–10</i> for the first time.
2011	AIHW child protection data are identified as a key data source for reporting in <i>An outline of National Standards for out-of-home care: A priority under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020</i> .
2012	Data on relative/kinship carers are included in <i>Child protection Australia 2010–11</i> for the first time.
2013	The CP NMDS unit record (child-level) collection was implemented in 2012–13. The introduction of the CP NMDS marks a major step towards improving the comparability of child protection data across jurisdictions. <i>Child protection Australia 2012–13</i> is released with new analyses made possible by the CP NMDS such as reporting on the number of children receiving child protection services (including the components of services received and breakdowns by Indigenous status and age), co-occurring types of abuse and neglect, and the level of socioeconomic status of children at the point of notification.
2014	
2015	AIHW report presents a snapshot of the academic performance of children in the care of child protection services in <i>Educational outcomes for children in care: linking 2013 child protection and NAPLAN data</i> . AIHW report examines <i>Young people in child protection and under youth justice supervision 2013–14</i> with follow-up reports published in 2015–16 and 2018–19.
2016	AIHW releases report on <i>Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection</i> .
2019	AIHW reports on results from the 2018 national survey of children in out-of-home care in <i>The views of children and young people in out-of-home care</i> . This followed a pilot national survey in 2015. <i>Child protection Australia 2018–19</i> implements a nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care and includes new indicators to report against the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework.
2020	AIHW reports on 5 indicators to measure progress on the <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle</i> . Safety in care data are developed for the CP NMDS to improve reporting on children subject to substantiated abuse in care in response to recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
2021	AIHW release a report on <i>Child protection in the time of COVID-19</i> . Release of <i>Child protection Australia 2019–20</i> marks 30 years of child protection reporting at AIHW.

1 Introduction

Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children (UNICEF 2006). Where children cannot live safely at home with their family, child protection systems prioritise children's physical, mental, and psychosocial needs to safeguard their lives and futures (UNICEF 2006). 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 2006) defines child maltreatment (child abuse and neglect) as:

All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting 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 (WHO 2006).

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.

Several government and non-government organisations share a common duty of care towards the protection of children and young people. Government departments responsible for child protection 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.

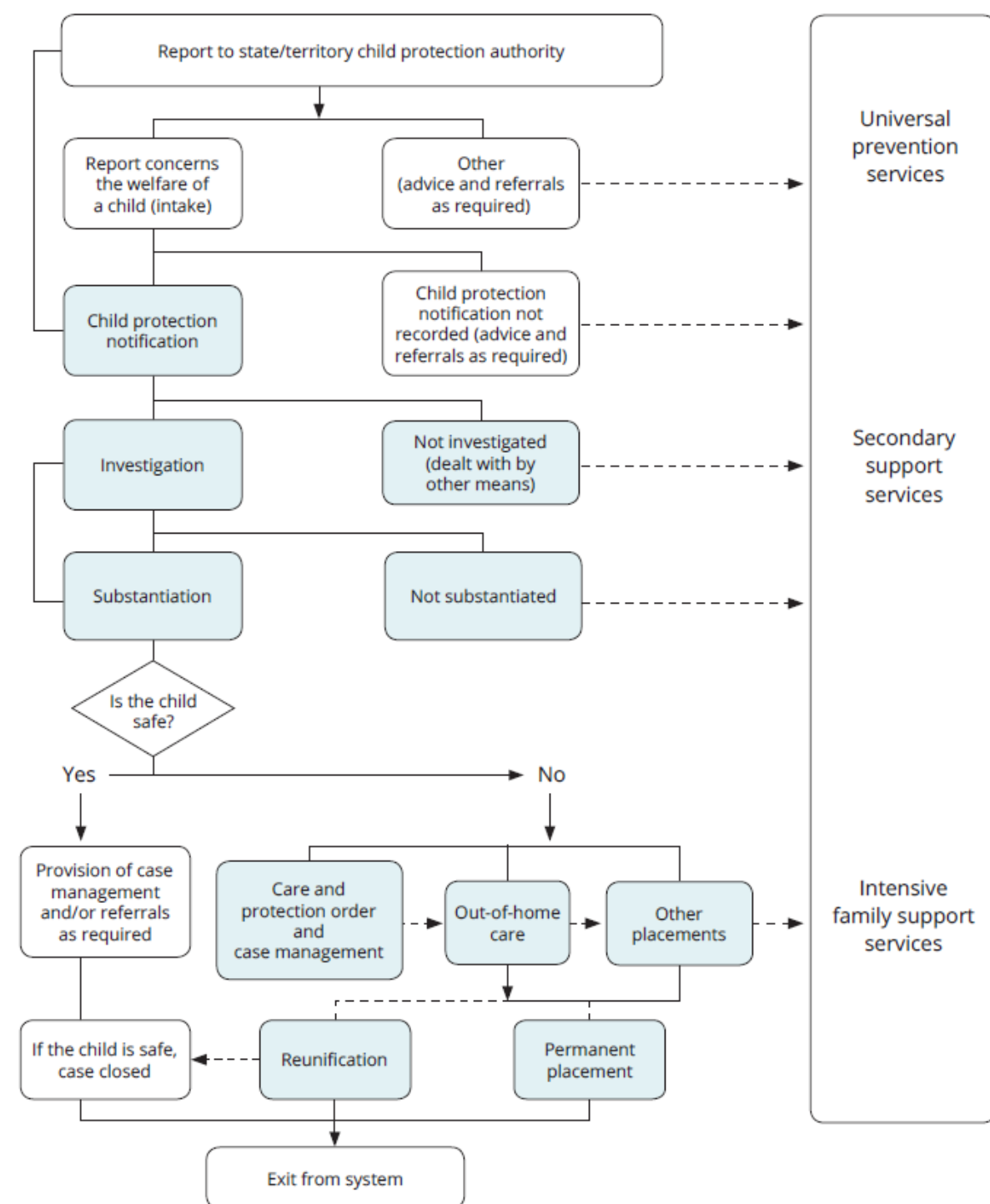
Child protection agencies and non-government organisations assist vulnerable children who have been, or are at risk of harm, or whose parents are unable to provide appropriate care or protection. Children and their families come into contact with the child protection system during the investigation and 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.

The national recurrent spending on child protection and out-of-home care was \$5.8 billion in 2019–20, a real increase of \$265 million (5%) on 2018–19. This continues a pattern of increased spending over the past 5-year periods, averaging an annual increase of about \$380 million between 2014–15 and 2019–20 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2021).

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.

Across Australia, the main processes of the child protection system are similar. A simplified version of these processes is shown in Figure 1.1, with further explanation in Box 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Child protection process 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.

Box 1.1: Child protection key concepts

Notifications, investigations, and substantiations

Once a child concern report has been classified as a notification, the case is further assessed to determine the next action to be taken. This can include an investigation or referral to support services. In cases where the child is deemed to be safe, no further action is taken.

Investigations are undertaken to gain more information about a child involved in a notification. This may include interviews with the child, their parents and/or other family members, visits to the child's home and collection of information from other sources. An investigation will determine that the notification is either 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated'.

A substantiation indicates that there is reason to believe that the child has been, is being, or is likely to be harmed. In these cases, the child protection department attempts to ensure the safety of the child. This may include implementing a care and protection order, placing a child in out-of-home care, or engaging family support services. Where it is safe to do so, for example, where parents are able to provide safety, or a safety plan has been put in place during an investigation, it may be determined that no further action is needed.

Care and protection orders

In cases where further intervention is necessary, the department may apply to the court for a care and protection order. This is a last resort used for cases where there is risk of serious harm to the child, and all other care options have been exhausted. The level of intervention in the child's life is dependent upon the type of care and protection order issued by the court (see Table 4.1 for further details on care and protection orders).

Out-of-home care

Children are placed in out-of-home care for various reasons. Children who are the subjects of a substantiation of abuse or neglect may be placed into out-of-home care in order to provide them with a safe environment. There are currently no national data available on the reasons children are placed in out-of-home care.

As out-of-home care requires significant intervention in a child's life, it is used as a last resort. The current priority is to keep children safely at home with their families wherever possible. If this is not possible the preferred option is to place the child within their wider family or community. This is particularly emphasised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in order to maintain their connection to culture and country, as outlined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (SNAICC, 2018).

Once a child is placed in out-of-home care, efforts are focused on maintaining the stability of their placement (permanency) and/or reuniting the child with their family if appropriate (reunification). Regardless of whether a child remains in out-of-home care on a long-term basis or reunites with their family, the goal is to provide a stable, safe environment for the child to grow up in.

Family support services

Family support services may be used instead of, or in addition to other child protection interventions. These services might include programs to prevent family dysfunction and maltreatment, provide support and advice to families, develop parenting skills, and family reunification services. More intensive programs are offered to assist the most vulnerable families (COAG 2009).

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.

Child concern reports 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 (AIFS: Bromfield & Holzer 2008; DSS 2018). 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 (COAG 2014).

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 C to E (online).

What data are used in this report?

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 are those aged under 18 and for some states and territories, this also includes unborn children.

The CP NMDS consists of several unit record (child-level) files from all states and territories except New South Wales (where aggregate counts are supplied for most tables in this publication). The data were extracted from state and territory child protection administrative data sets according to nationally agreed definitions and technical specifications.

National child protection data are based on cases reported to departments responsible for child protection, so are likely to understate the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect. Further, 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 1 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 Appendix B (online) 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 Appendix C (online) for more information.

Metadata for the CP NMDS are available on METeOR, the AIHW’s online metadata repository, and can be accessed at <https://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/740158>.

A data quality statement for the CP NMDS is also available at <https://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/742863>.

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.

In this report, trends for out-of-home care are for 4-year periods: 2016–17 to 2019–20. 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 B to E (online) 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 2019–20 data continue to be unavailable for households exiting foster care and households exiting relative/kinship care (see Chapter 7).

Due to data quality issues, Tasmania had a higher proportion of children with ‘Unknown’ Indigenous status in 2017–18. Tasmania undertook remediation work to address this issue and re-supplied data for reporting of 2017–18 information for the 2018–19 *Child protection Australia* report. Data quality for 2019–20 is not impacted; however, trends for Indigenous children in this report will not match *Child protection Australia* reports prior to 2018–19.

How is this report structured?

There are 8 chapters in this report, each providing information and data on children who are, or have been, involved with different components of the child protection system:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Children receiving child protection services

Chapter 3 – Notifications, investigations and substantiations

Chapter 4 – Care and protection orders

Chapter 5 – Out-of-home care

Chapter 6 – Permanency

Chapter 7 – Carers

Chapter 8 – Intensive family support services

The supplementary data tables referred to in this report (prefixed with 'S' for supplementary, 'T' for trends, or 'P' for population data) are available to download from www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2019-20/data.

Online appendixes referred to in this report provide further technical notes for some analyses and information and context for jurisdictional policies and practices that can affect the data reported. Appendixes B to E are available to download online.

Box 1.3: Impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

In light of the unprecedented impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic, the Australian Government and state and territory governments recognised the necessity of reprioritising national efforts and resources towards responding to the major emergency unfolding across Australia.

Measures put in place as part of government responses to COVID-19 in the first half of 2020 included travel bans/restrictions, limitations on non-urgent face-to-face work and remote learning for students, which had flow-on effects for child protection processes during 2019–20. No specific impacts on the annual data are highlighted in this report; however, the impact of COVID-19 may become apparent in child protection data 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. The report is available to download from www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-in-the-time-of-covid-19.

2 Children receiving child protection services

Key findings

- In 2019–20, about 174,700 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.
- 57% of these children (100,100) were the subject of an investigation only.
- 67% of children (117,700) receiving services were repeat clients.
- About 55,300 (1 in 6) Aboriginal and Torres Strait children received child protection services in 2019–20.

What services are provided by the child protection system?

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 1 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.

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued): Services for vulnerable children

Service	When does a child receive this service?	What's involved?
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 0–17 who in 2019–20 were:

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

'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. Box 2.1 outlines data limitations for reporting on children receiving child protection 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 5.1 for further information, as well as to table footnotes and Appendixes B to E (online) before comparing data across jurisdictions.

What services did children receive?

In 2019–20, about 174,700 (1 in 32) children received child protection services (Figure 2.1), a rate of 31 per 1,000 children aged 0–17.

Of children receiving child protection services in 2019–20:

- 117,900 were the subject of an investigation (21 per 1,000)
- 72,000 were on a care and protection order (13 per 1,000)
- 56,500 were in out-of-home care (10 per 1,000).

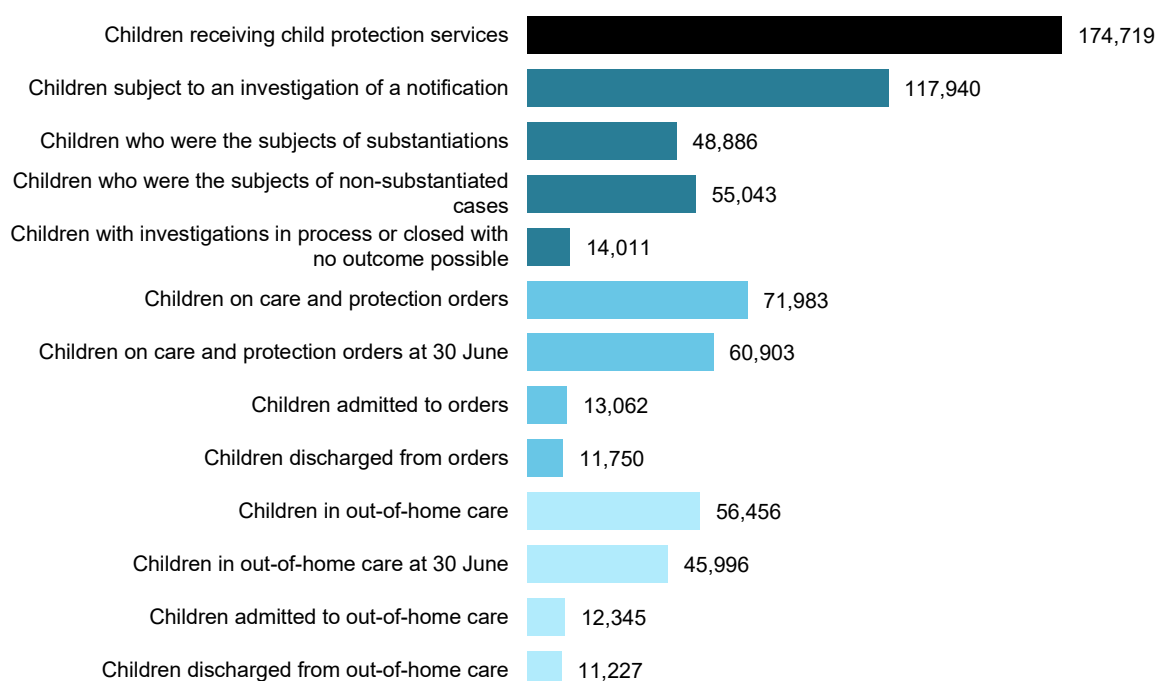
The services provided to children depend upon their individual circumstances. Following investigation, some cases of child abuse/neglect may require subsequent interventions, such as a care and protection order and/or out-of-home care placement. In other cases, an investigation may determine a child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

Because of this, children may be involved in more than 1 component of the child protection system. As such, the count of children in each component does not sum to the total children receiving child protection services (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 in this analysis of children receiving child protection services. 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 not been included in this section as unit record-level data were not available for national reporting. See Chapter 8 for information about children receiving intensive family support services.

Figure 2.1: Children receiving child protection services, 2019–20 (number)



Notes

1. Children might be involved in more than 1 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.

Sources: Tables 2.2, 4.2 and supplementary data tables (online) S3.3, S5.1, S5.2, and T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

**Table 2.2: Children receiving child protection services, by state or territory, 2019–20
(number and rate)**

Child protection component	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification	41,442	30,420	22,776	12,268	4,240	697	1,385	4,712	117,940
Children on care and protection orders	23,256	19,503	13,188	6,969	5,061	1,672	1,020	1,314	71,983
Children in out-of-home care	18,779	12,728	11,051	5,813	4,705	1,303	809	1,268	56,456
Children receiving child protection services	58,567	45,686	34,036	18,016	8,157	2,234	2,245	5,778	174,719
Number per 1,000									
Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification	23.3	21.2	19.2	20.2	11.5	6.2	14.5	76.8	20.9
Children on care and protection orders	13.1	13.6	11.1	11.5	13.7	14.8	10.7	21.4	12.8
Children in out-of-home care	10.5	8.9	9.3	9.6	12.7	11.6	8.5	20.7	10.0
Children receiving child protection services	32.9	31.9	28.8	29.7	22.1	19.8	23.5	94.1	31.0

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 C (online) for more information.
2. 'Children receiving child protection services' is defined as 1 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 Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

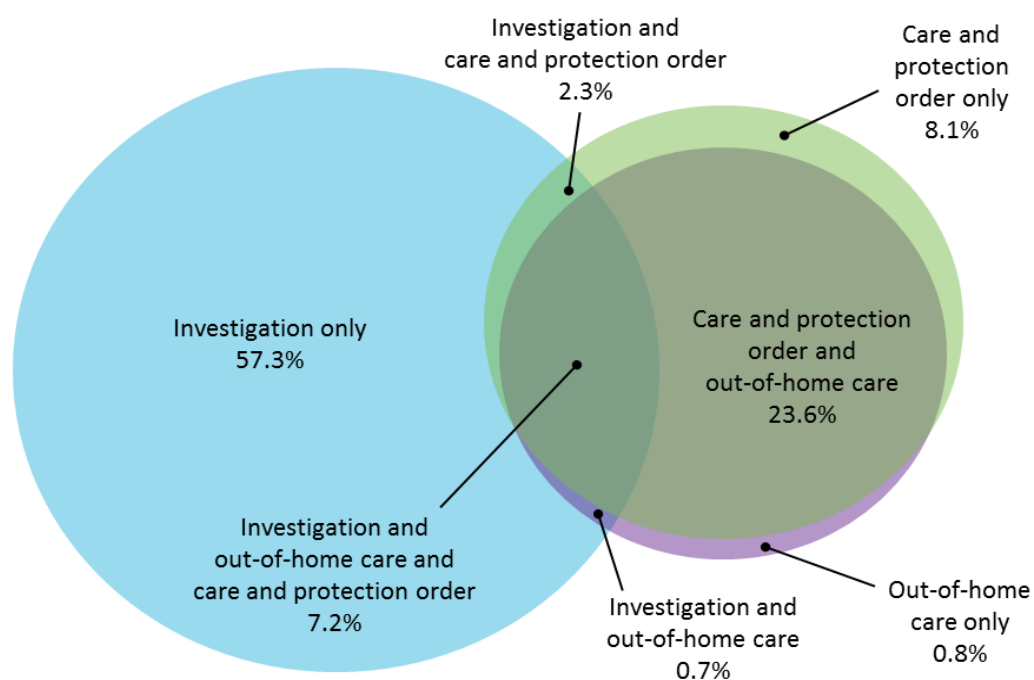
Because children may receive a combination of child protection services, there are links and overlaps between:

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

In 2019–20, 57% of the 174,700 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, 7% of children were involved in all 3 components of the system.

The degree of overlap across the system components varied little between 2016–17 and 2019–20 (AIHW 2018, 2019, 2020).

Figure 2.2: Children receiving child protection services, by component of services received, 2019–20 (per cent)



Source: Supplementary data table (online) S2.1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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 59% 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, 2019–20 (number and per cent)

Investigation outcome	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT ^(a)	Total
Number									
Substantiated	13,936	11,627	4,364	3,772	1,379	285	174	1,004	36,541
Not substantiated	15,432	12,662	13,553	4,860	1,355	36	1,008	2,608	51,514
<i>Total children in finalised investigations</i>	<i>29,368</i>	<i>24,289</i>	<i>17,917</i>	<i>8,632</i>	<i>2,734</i>	<i>321</i>	<i>1,182</i>	<i>3,612</i>	<i>88,055</i>
Per cent									
Substantiated	47.5	47.9	24.4	43.7	50.4	88.8	14.7	27.8	41.5
Not substantiated	52.5	52.1	75.6	56.3	49.6	11.2	85.3	72.2	58.5
<i>Total children in finalised investigations</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total children subject to an investigation only	34,963	24,677	20,262	10,909	3,046	529	1,215	4,464	100,065

(a) In July 2018 the Northern Territory introduced the One Child One Case policy to improve the way in which Territory Families responds to subsequent notifications for children who have a current open case. Consequently, fewer investigations have been commenced. Subsequent notifications redirected to an open Investigation may lead to longer investigation timeframes. See Appendix D (online) for more information.

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 C (online) for more information.
2. This table includes data for children whose only contact with child protection services during 2019–20 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 outcome are further restricted to include only those for whom an investigation was finalised in the reporting period. So, it excludes investigations in process, or closed with no outcome possible. Data for all children who were the subject of substantiations are available in Supplementary data table (online) S3.3.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

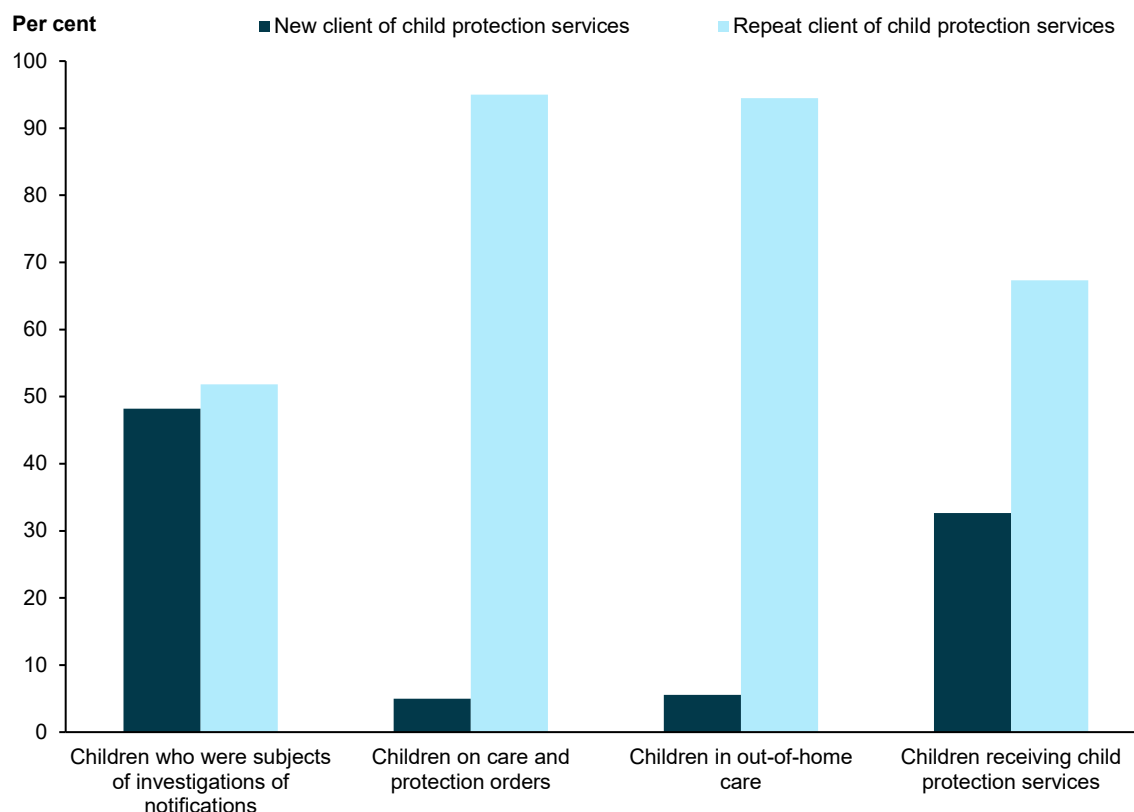
What were the characteristics of children receiving child protection services?

New and repeat clients

Data on new 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.

Over two-thirds (67%) of children receiving child protection services in 2019–20 had been in contact with the system before (Figure 2.3). However, the percentage of repeat clients was substantially higher for children on a care and protection order (95%) or in out-of-home care (94%) than for those who were the subject of investigations during the year (52%).

Figure 2.3: New and repeat clients receiving child protection services, by service type, 2019–20 (per cent)



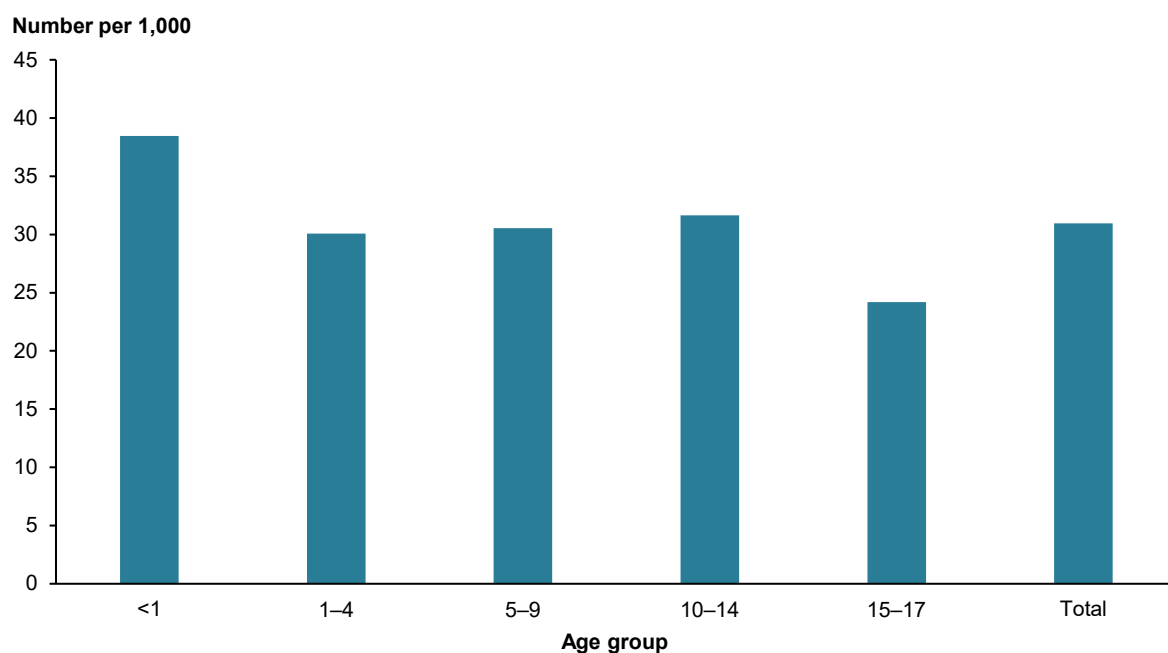
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S2.2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Age

Across Australia, 11,700 infants (children aged under 1) received child protection services in 2019–20. Infants were also most likely (38 per 1,000 children) to have received child protection services, while those aged 15–17 were least likely (24 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 (COAG 2009; DSS 2015, 2018; FaHCSIA 2012).

Figure 2.4: Children receiving child protection services, by age group, 2019–20 (rate)



Notes

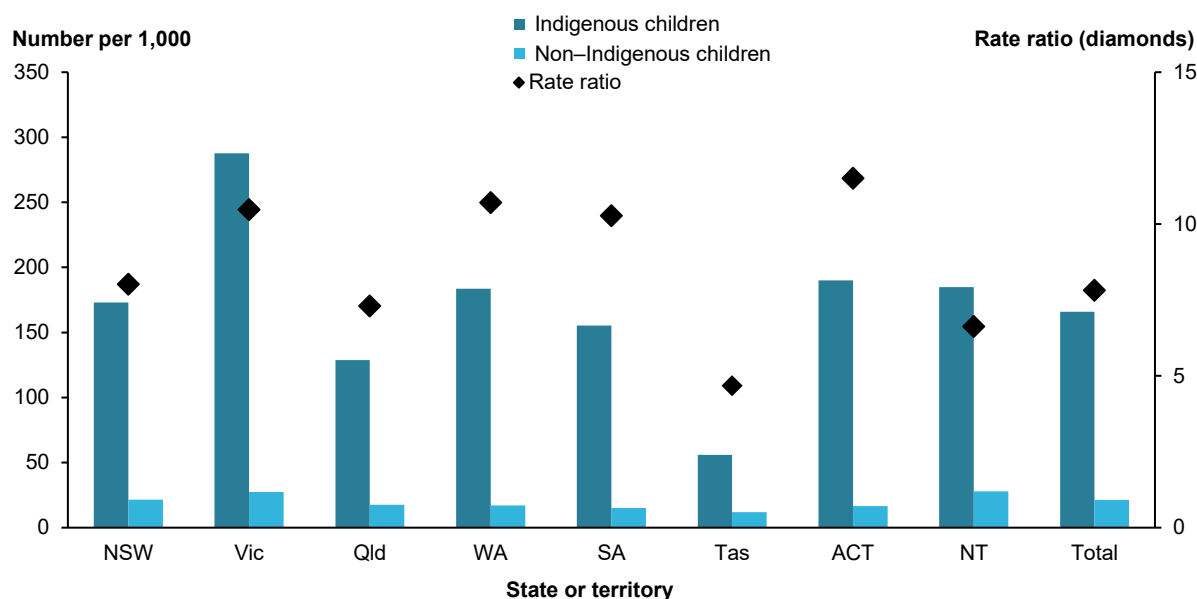
1. Unborn children might be covered under child protection legislation, so are included in the 'Total' rate. However, they are excluded from rate calculation for the 'less than 1' age category.
2. Age is calculated as at the start of the financial year (that is, July 2019) if the first contact began 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 Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S2.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2019–20, 55,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children received child protection services, a rate of 166 per 1,000 Indigenous children. This was almost 8 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (21 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children) (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Children receiving child protection services, by Indigenous status and state or territory, 2019–20 (rate and rate ratio)



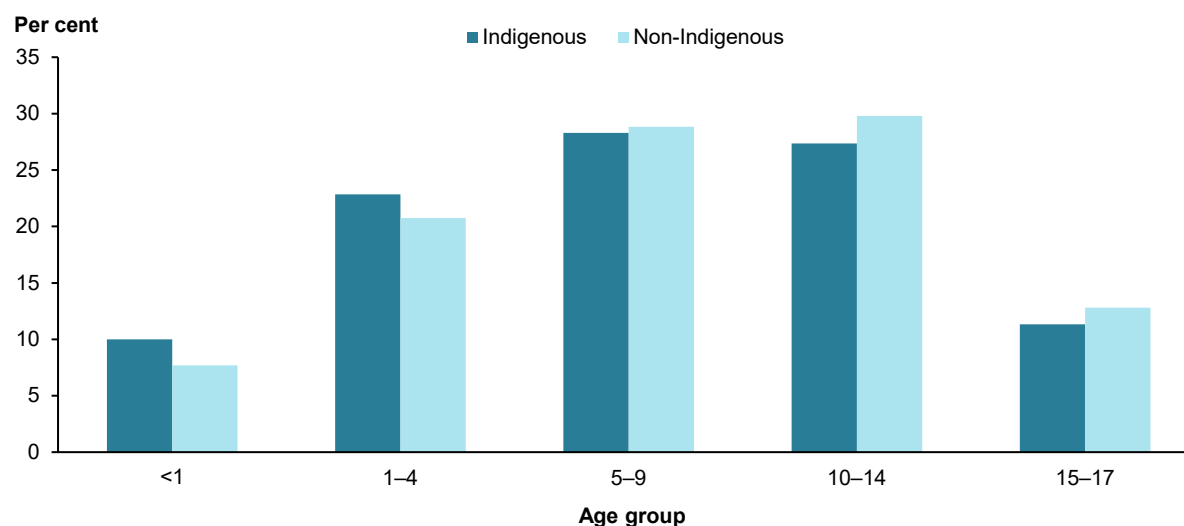
Notes

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 C for more information.
2. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates and rate ratios.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S2.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

A slightly higher proportion (33%) of Indigenous children receiving child protection services were aged under 5, compared with 28% of non-Indigenous children (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: Children receiving child protection services, by age group and Indigenous status, 2019–20 (per cent)



Note: Age is calculated as at the start of the financial year (that is 1 July 2019) 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.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S2.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Has the provision of child protection services changed over time?

Trends for children

The number of children receiving child protection services rose about 4% over 4 years—from about 168,300 children in 2016–17 to about 174,700 children in 2019–20. The rate of children receiving child protection services was about the same in 2019–20 as it was in 2016–17 (31 per 1,000 children) with minor fluctuations during the period (Table A1).

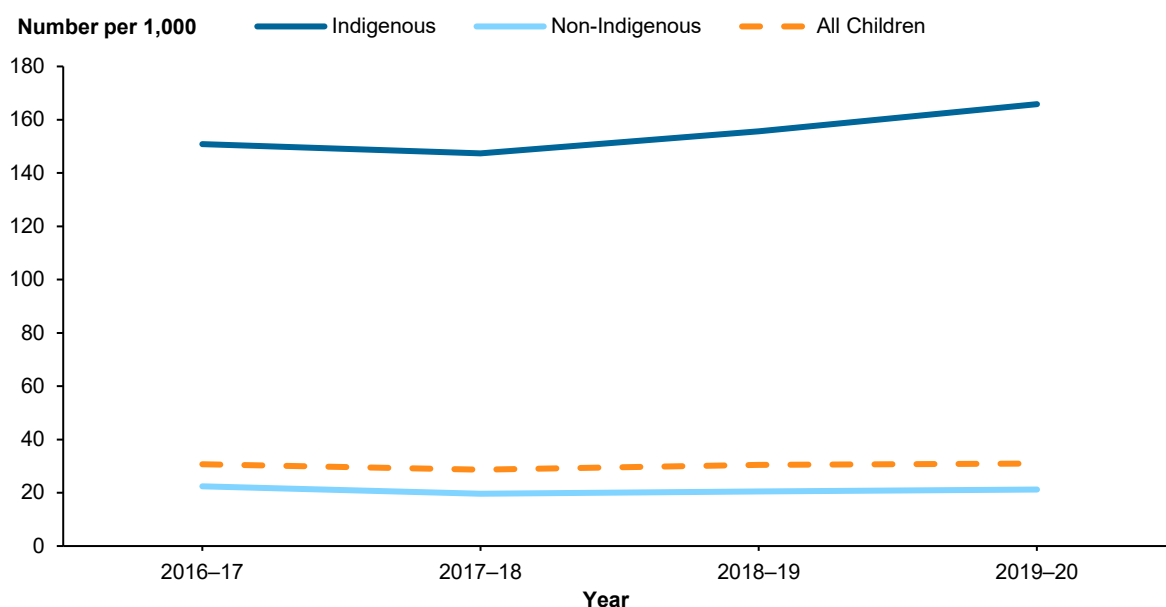
For state/territory trend data on the number and rate of children who received child protection services between 2016–17 and 2019–20, see Table A1.

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.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The number of Indigenous children receiving child protection services rose between 2016–17 and 2019–20, from 49,200 to 55,300. This was reflected in the rate, which rose from 151 to 166 per 1,000 Indigenous children in the same period. For non-Indigenous children the rates declined 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 2019–20 (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 C (online) for more information.
2. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

3 Notifications, investigations, and substantiations

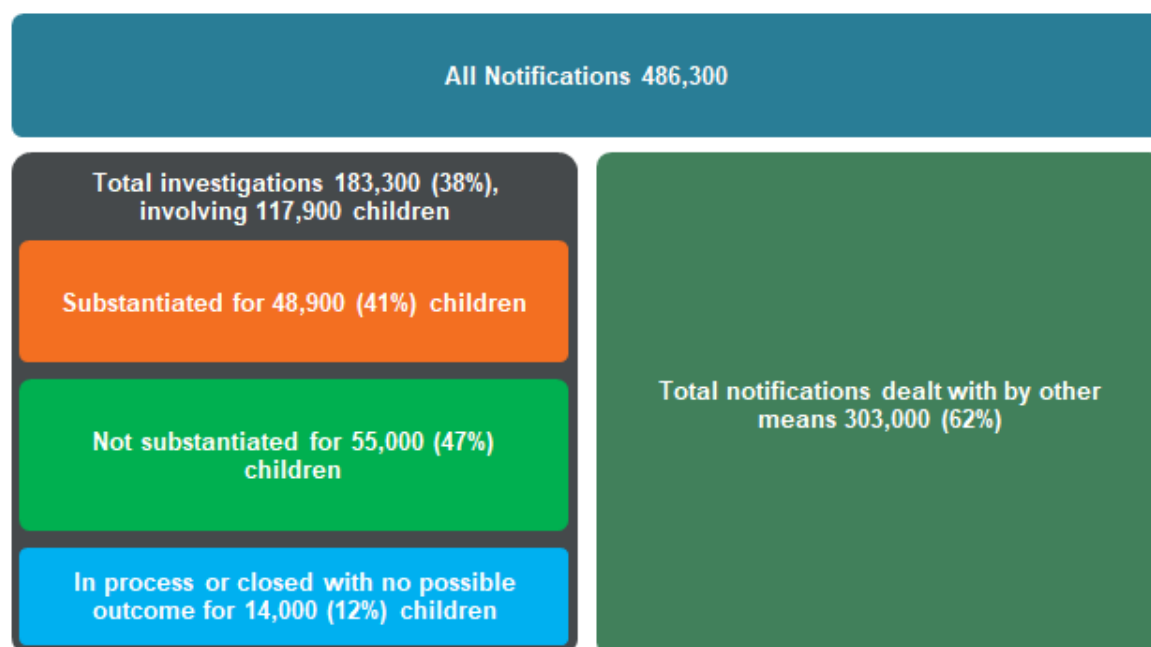
Key findings

- 183,300 investigations of notified abuse/neglect were conducted for 117,900 children in 2019–20.
- 70,000 claims of child maltreatment were substantiated for 48,900 children.
- 1 in 23 (14,300) Indigenous children were the subjects of substantiations, making them almost 7 times as likely to be the subject of a substantiation as non-Indigenous children.

How does the process for determining child maltreatment work?

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, 2019–20



Sources: Supplementary data tables (online) S3.1 and S3.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

The data in this chapter relate to notifications that departments responsible for child protection received between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020 (see Table 3.1 and Appendix C online for further information <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2019-20/related-material>>).

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 C online).
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 the 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 C online).
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 C online).

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 Appendixes B to E (online) before comparing data across jurisdictions.

Some notable issues which affect the completeness and interpretability of the data presented in this chapter 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.

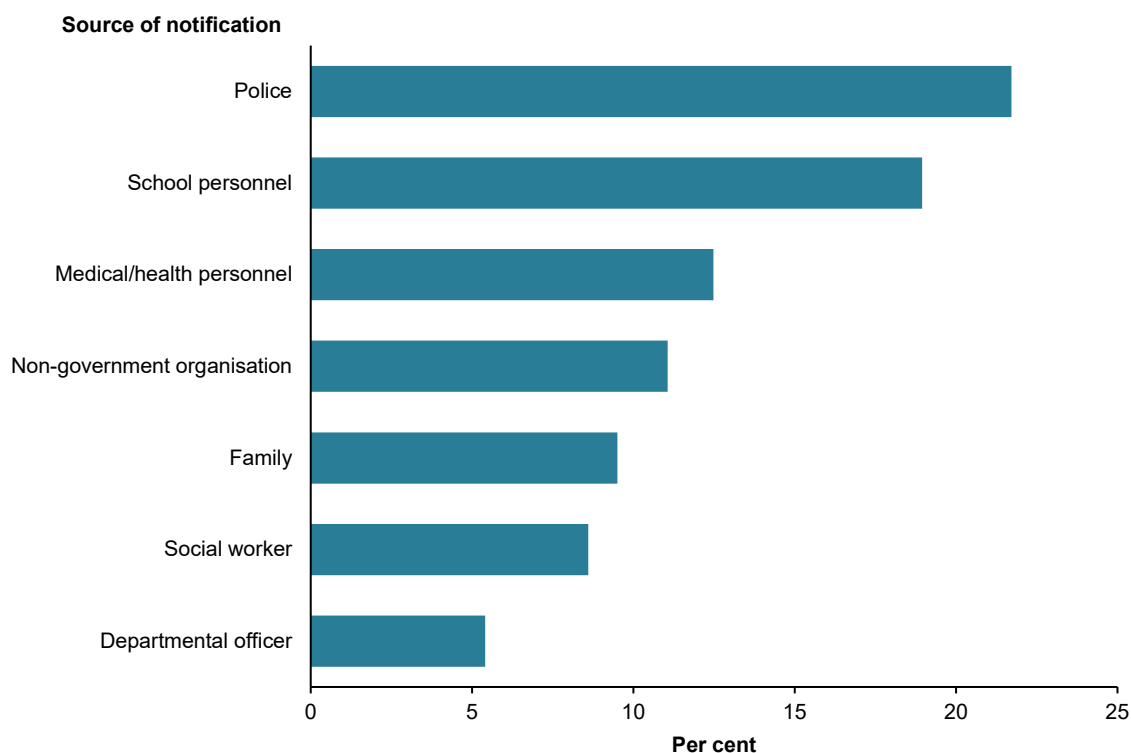
How many notifications and investigations occurred?

Of the approximately 486,300 notifications in 2019–20, about 183,300 (38%) were assessed as requiring further investigation and the rest (303,000 or 62%) were dealt with by other means, such as by being referred to a support service (Supplementary table S3.1).

For investigations in 2019–20, the most common source of the notification was police (22%), followed by school personnel (19%) (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 online <www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/child-protection/child-protection-legislation-by-jurisdiction>.

Figure 3.2: Investigations, by most common source of notification, 2019–20 (per cent)



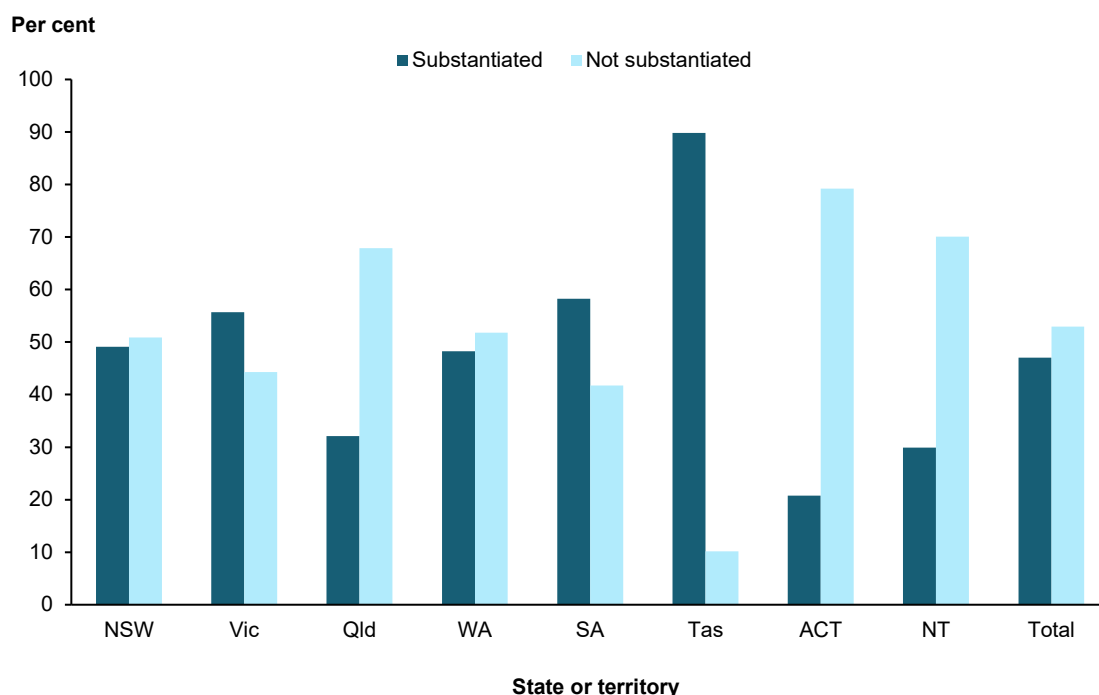
Note: Not all notification sources are shown—see Supplementary table S3.2 for more information.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Finalised investigations are notifications made during 2019–20 that were investigated and for which an outcome of either ‘substantiated’ or ‘not substantiated’ was recorded by 31 August 2020. 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% of total notifications or 8% of children in investigations) are not reported in the data for this or subsequent reporting periods (supplementary tables S3.1 and S3.3). See Appendix C (online) for more information on investigations in process.

Almost half (47%) of the children in finalised investigations were the subjects of substantiations in 2019–20 (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Children who were the subjects of finalised investigations, by outcome and state or territory, 2019–20 (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 C (online) for more information.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Children might be involved in multiple statutory child protection cases during any given year. Across Australia in 2019–20, the total number of notifications (about 486,300) involved about 275,000 children. The number of substantiations (about 70,000) involved about 48,900 children (Supplementary table T1).

These data reflect that some children were the subject of more than 1 notification and/or substantiation—21% were the subject of more than 1 substantiation during the year (Supplementary table S3.4). On average, around 2 notifications were received per child.

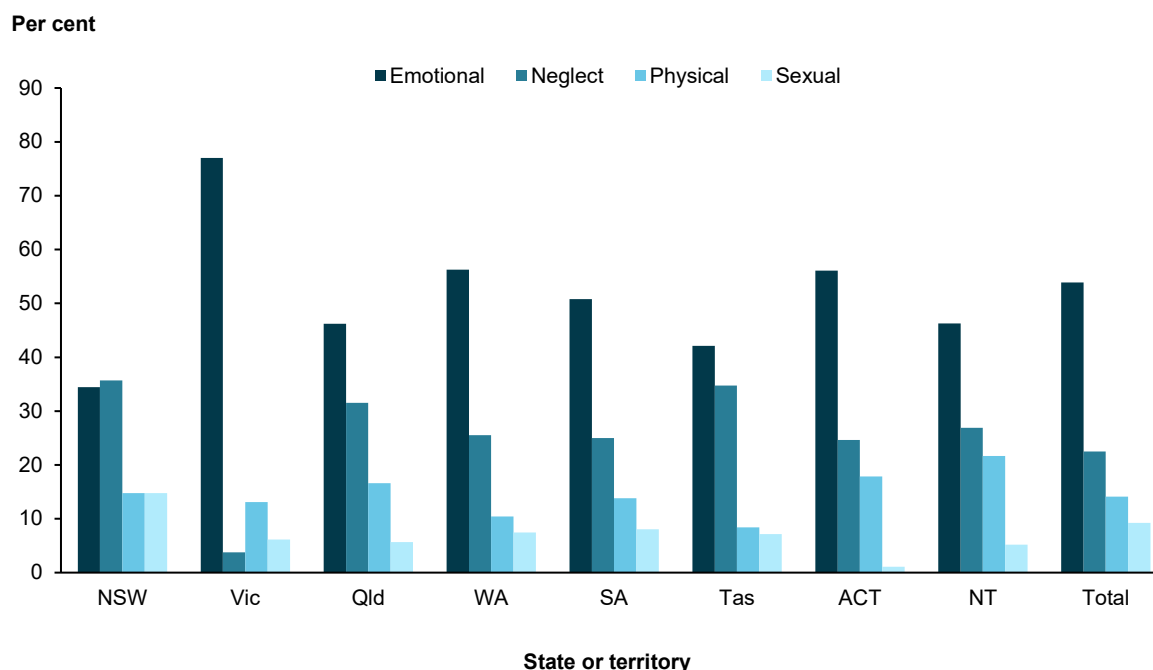
What types of abuse were substantiated?

Types of abuse and neglect

The type of abuse or neglect reported for children who were 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 2019–20, emotional abuse was the most common primary type of abuse substantiated for children (54%), followed by neglect (22%), physical abuse (14%), and sexual abuse (9%), 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, 2019–20 (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 C (online) 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.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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 (37%) and neglect (32%) were also the most likely types to co-occur.

Emotional abuse co-occurred in half (50%) of substantiations where physical abuse was the primary type of abuse or neglect, and in 35% of substantiations where neglect was the primary type.

Neglect co-occurred in 35% of substantiations where emotional abuse was the primary type of abuse, and in 31% 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 in substantiated notifications, by primary type of abuse or neglect, 2019–20 (per cent)

Primary type of abuse or neglect	Co-occurring type of abuse or neglect ^{(a)(b)}				Total substantiations ^(c)
	Physical	Sexual	Emotional	Neglect	
Physical	..	3.5	49.7	30.5	10,116
Sexual	11.2	..	20.1	13.5	6,041
Emotional	30.2	2.1	..	35.1	34,536
Neglect	12.6	2.0	35.4	..	19,112
Average co-occurrence^(d)	22.6	2.3	36.9	31.6	69,805

(a) Excludes 2,663 cases for Queensland where the same type of abuse/neglect was recorded as both a primary and co-occurring type of abuse/neglect.

(b) 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.

(c) Excludes cases where the primary type of abuse was unknown.

(d) '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 2019–20.

What were the characteristics of children with substantiated abuse or neglect?

Age

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 2019–20, children in younger age groups were more likely to be the subjects of substantiations than those in older age groups.

Infants (children aged under 1) were most likely (16 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, 2019–20 (rate)

Age group	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number per 1,000									
Less than 1	13.7	25.5	8.2	11.8	21.9	4.9	4.2	44.1	15.9
1–4	9.4	12.4	5.7	9.7	7.5	3.6	3.9	23.9	9.3
5–9	8.6	11.7	5.5	7.6	5.8	3.7	3.3	16.1	8.3
10–14	9.2	11.3	5.0	6.7	4.5	3.0	2.4	16.9	8.1
15–17	6.6	6.2	2.6	3.1	2.0	1.4	1.2	9.6	4.8
0–17	8.9	11.7	5.1	7.4	6.0	3.2	2.9	18.7	8.3
All children	9.5	11.7	5.5	7.8	6.0	3.6	2.9	18.7	8.7
Children in substantiations (number)	16,856	16,714	6,537	4,726	2,217	406	280	1,150	48,886

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 substantiation. See Appendix C (online) 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 1' and '0–17' categories. Unborn children are included in the 'All children' rates.
3. 'All children' includes children of unknown age.
4. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

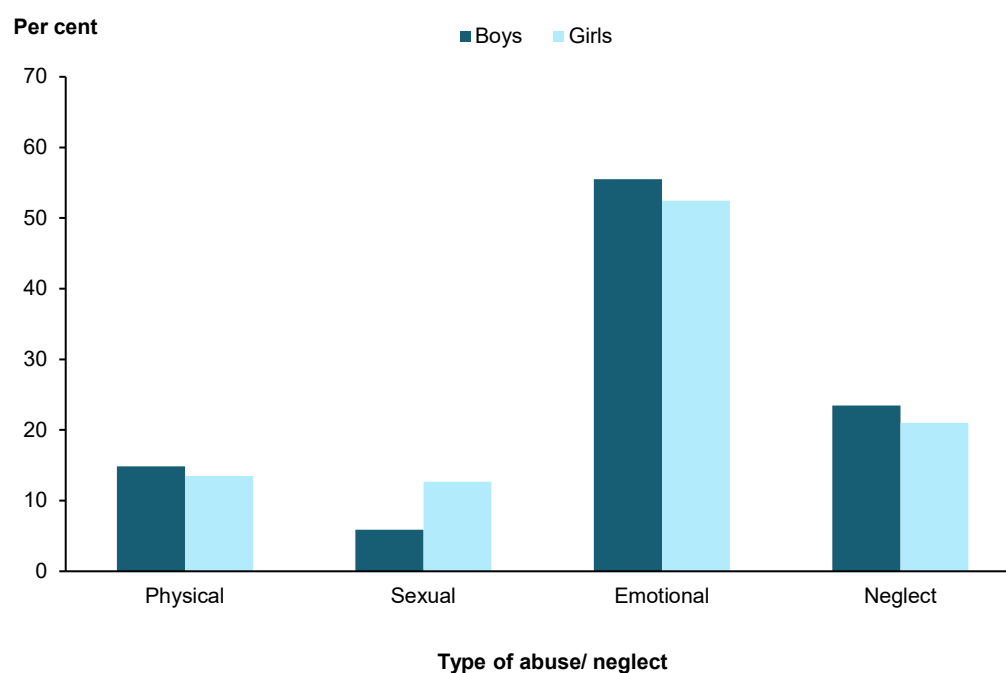
Sex

Slightly more girls (24,500) than boys (23,600) were the subjects of substantiations (Supplementary table S3.5).

A higher proportion of girls (13%) were the subjects of substantiations for sexual abuse than boys (6%) (Figure 3.5). This is consistent with recorded crime statistics for sexual assault (ABS 2019).

In contrast, boys had slightly higher percentages 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, 2019–20 (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.

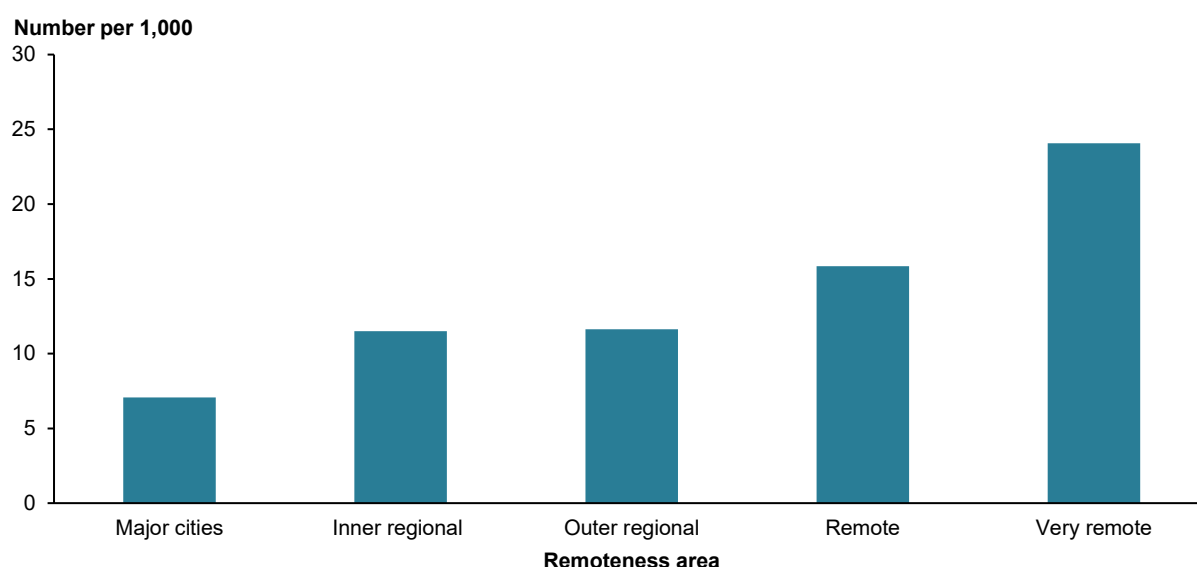
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Remoteness area

Children from geographically remote areas had the highest rates of substantiations—children from *Very remote* areas (24 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).

Of the children who were the subject of a substantiation from *Remote* and *Very Remote* areas, 88% were Indigenous. In *Major cities* 20% of children subject to substantiations were Indigenous (Supplementary table S3.7a).

Figure 3.6: Children who were the subjects of substantiations, by remoteness area, 2019–20 (rate)



Note: See Appendix B (online) for more information on the calculation of remoteness areas.

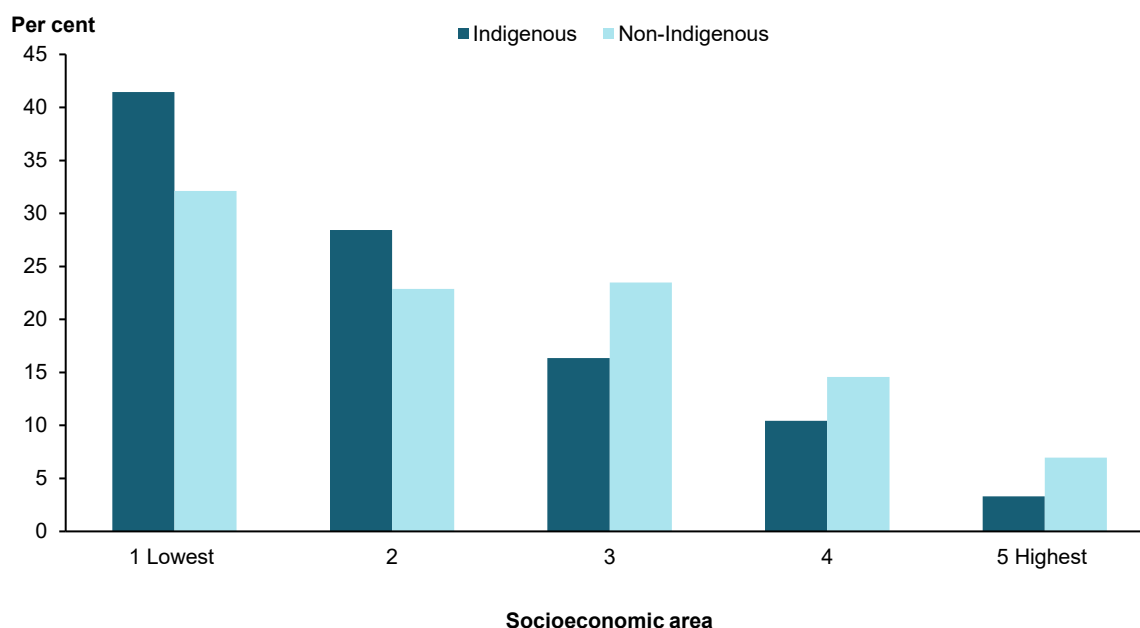
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.7b, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Socioeconomic area

Children who were the subjects of substantiations were more likely to be from the lowest socioeconomic areas (35% or 10,900 in the lowest socioeconomic area compared with 6% or 1,900 in the highest) (Supplementary table S3.8).

Indigenous children who were the subjects of substantiations were more likely to be from the lowest socioeconomic areas (41%) compared with non-Indigenous children (32%) (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Children who were the subjects of substantiations, by socioeconomic area and Indigenous status, 2019–20 (per cent)



Notes

1. Socioeconomic data exclude New South Wales, because location data were not available.

2. See Appendix B (online) for more information on the calculation of socioeconomic areas.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.8, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2019–20, 14,300 Indigenous children were the subject of a substantiation. This is a rate of 43 per 1,000— almost 7 times the rate of non-Indigenous children (6 per 1,000) (Figure 3.8). This is consistent with findings for previous years (Figure 3.14).

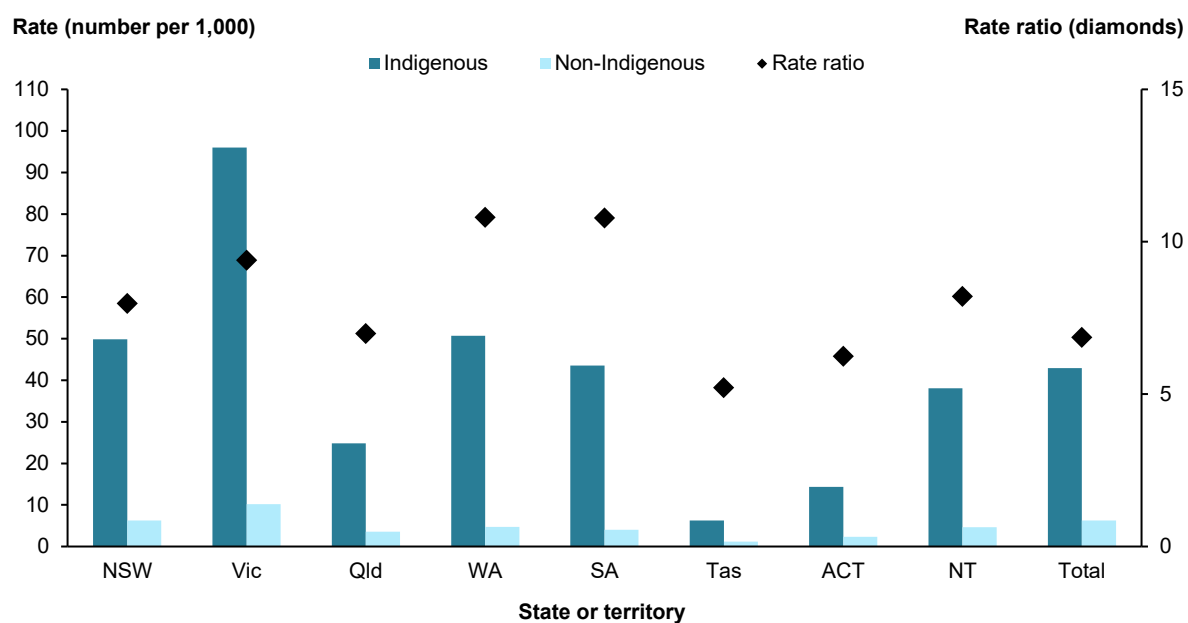
The reasons for the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection substantiations are complex. Underlying causes include:

- 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).

Indigenous children are also over-represented in other areas related to child safety, including:

- hospital admissions for injuries and assault
- experiences of homelessness
- involvement in the youth justice system (AIHW 2014).

Figure 3.8: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2019–20, by Indigenous status and state or territory (rate and rate ratio)



Notes

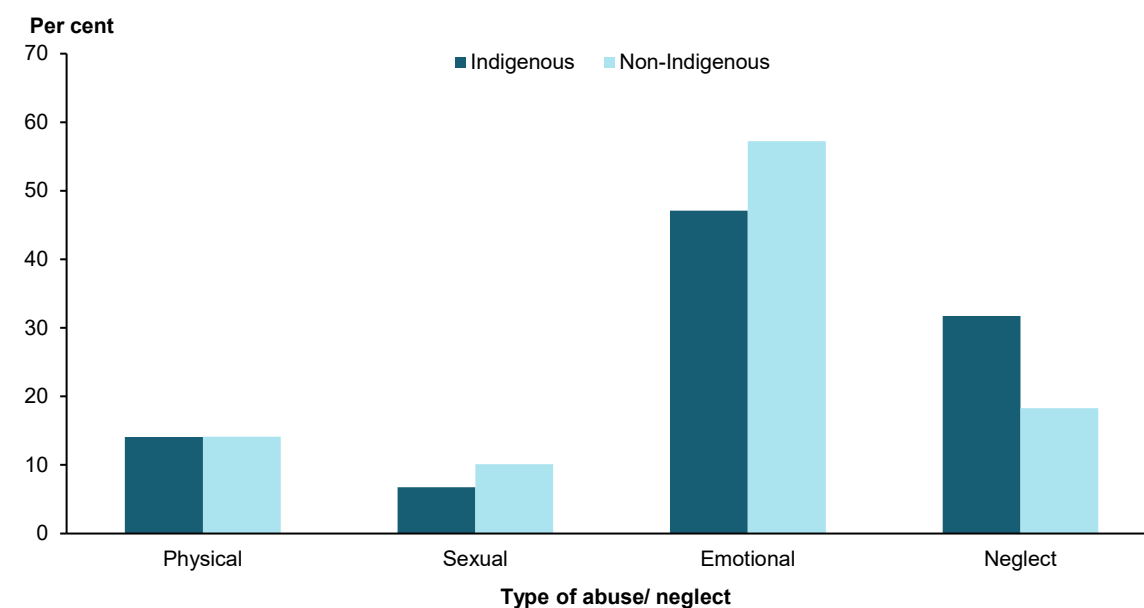
1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations. See Appendix C (online) for more information.
2. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates and rate ratios.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.9, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Type of abuse and neglect

Emotional abuse was the most common type of substantiated abuse for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. Indigenous children had a higher percentage of substantiations for neglect (32%) than non-Indigenous children (18%), and a lower percentage of substantiations for emotional and sexual abuse (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications, by Indigenous status and type of abuse or neglect, 2019–20 (per cent)



Notes

1. 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 type of abuse that is most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term.
2. Excludes some data for Tasmania due to small cell counts.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.10, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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

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 provided substantiations data for 2018–19. Trends in this chapter 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.

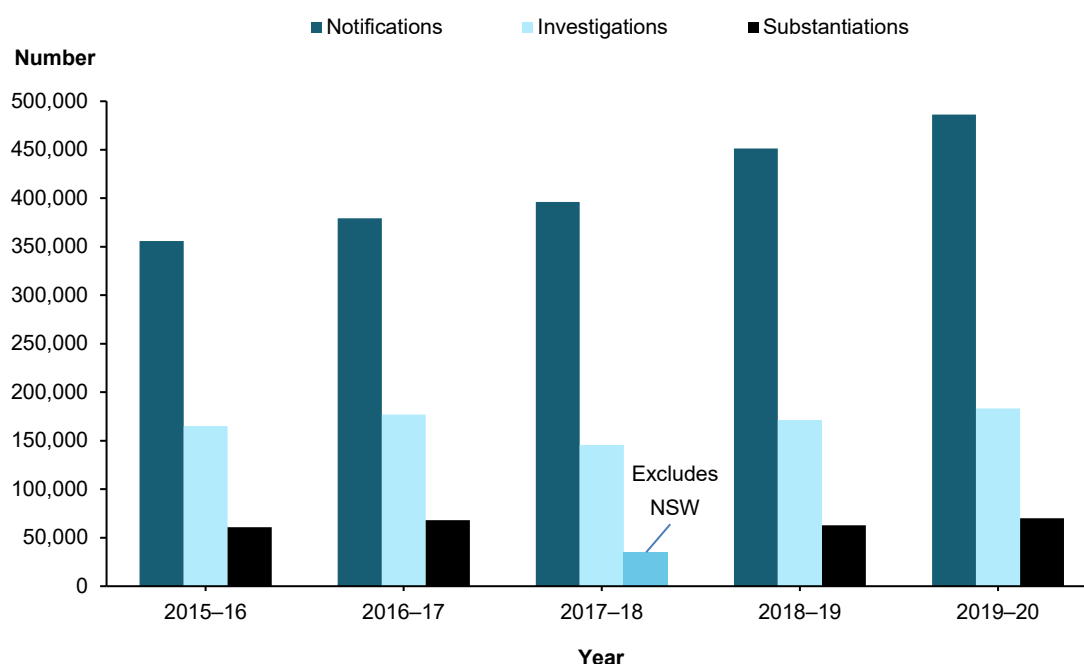
Trends for notifications, investigations and substantiations

Between 2015–16 and 2019–20, numbers rose by:

- 37% for notifications (355,900 in 2015–16 to 486,300 in 2019–20)
- 11% for investigations (165,000 in 2015–16 to 183,300 in 2019–20)
- 15% for substantiations (61,000 in 2015–16 to 70,000 in 2019–20) (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, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (number)



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 C (online) 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.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) T1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Trends for children

The rate of children who were the subjects of notifications rose from 42 per 1,000 children in 2015–16 to 49 per 1,000 in 2019–20 (Figure 3.11).

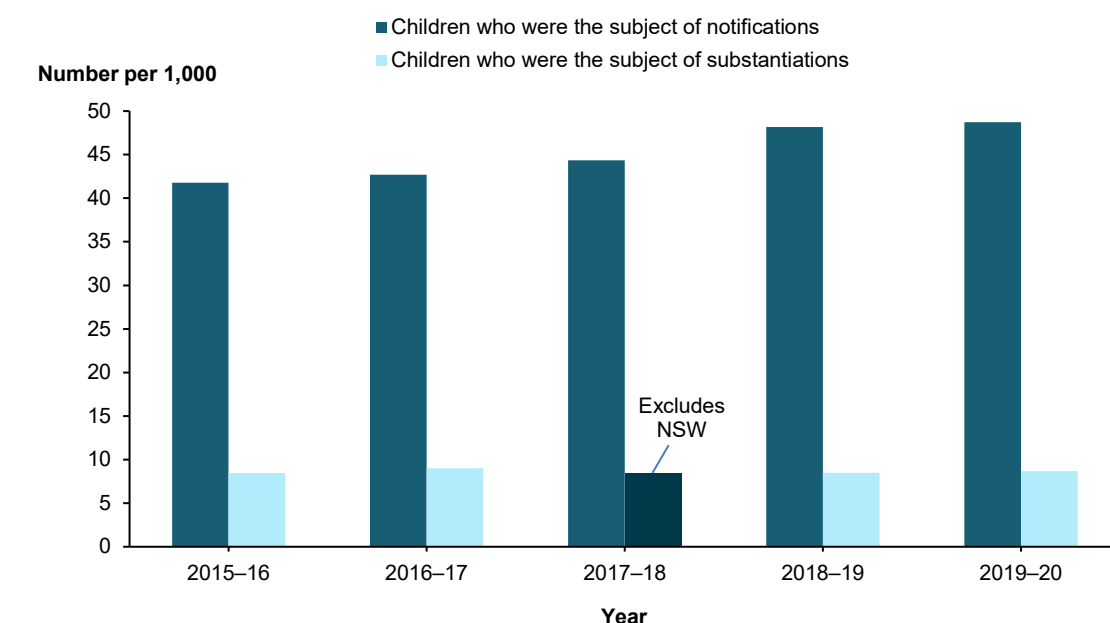
The rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations was 9 per 1,000 children in 2019–20, which was slightly higher than in 2015–16 (8 per 1,000 children).

For state/territory trend data on the number and rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations between 2015–16 and 2019–20, 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 B–E (online) <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2019-20/related-material>>.

Figure 3.11: Children who were the subjects of child protection notifications and substantiations, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (rate)



Notes

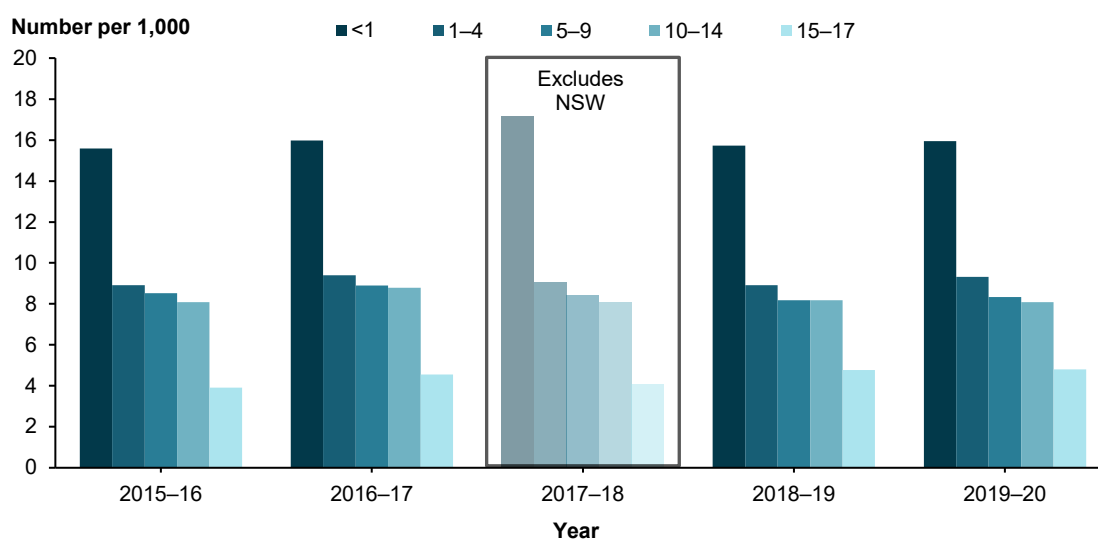
1. Data presented in this figure are not comparable over time due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data on notifications, investigations and substantiations and how this has changed over time. See Appendix C (online) for more information.
2. Substantiations data are unavailable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

Source: Supplementary data table (online) T1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Age profile

Since 2015–16, the rates of children aged under 1 who were the subjects of substantiations have been consistently higher than the rates for any other age group. The rate of children aged under 1 who were the subjects of substantiations was about the same in 2019–20 as it was in 2015–16 (16 per 1,000 children) with minor fluctuations during the period. The rates for most other age groups remained either relatively stable, or rose slightly over the 5-year period (Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12: Trends in children who were the subjects of substantiations, by age group, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (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 C (online) 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 1 year' age group in this figure.
4. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

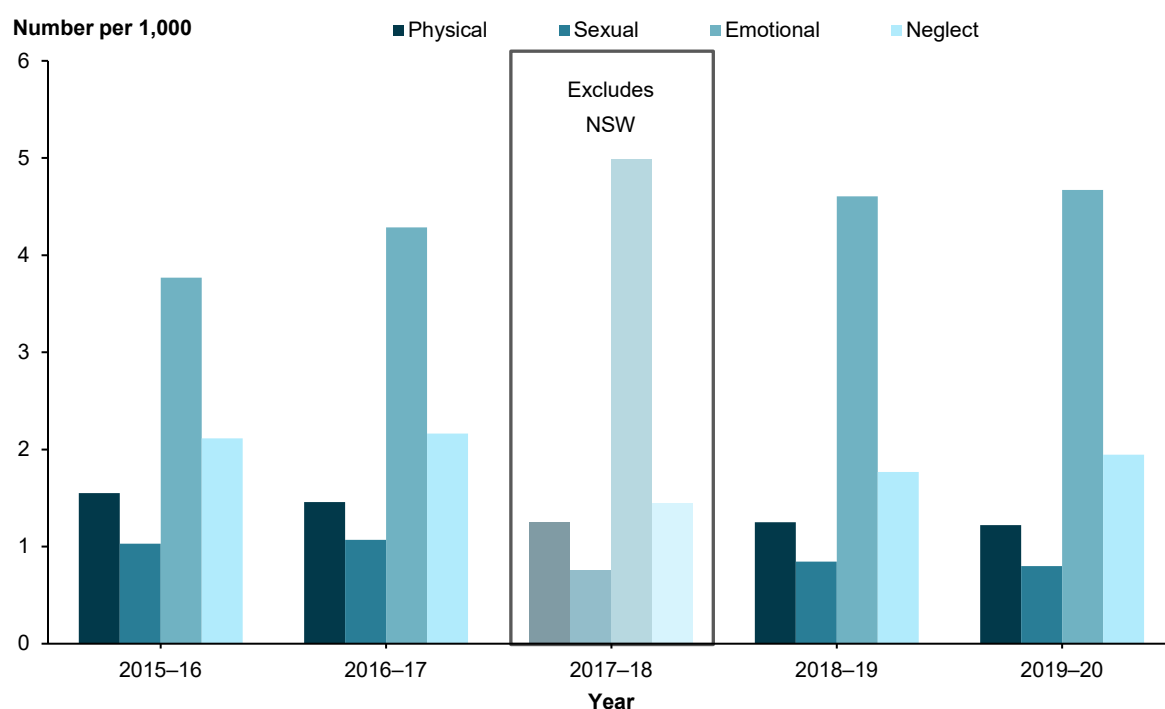
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.13, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Type of abuse and neglect

Between 2015–16 and 2019–20, the rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations for emotional abuse were the highest of all types of abuse or neglect, and showed the greatest increase of all types of abuse or neglect (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 2019–20 (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13: Trends in children who were the subjects of substantiations, by type of abuse or neglect, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (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 C (online) 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 Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

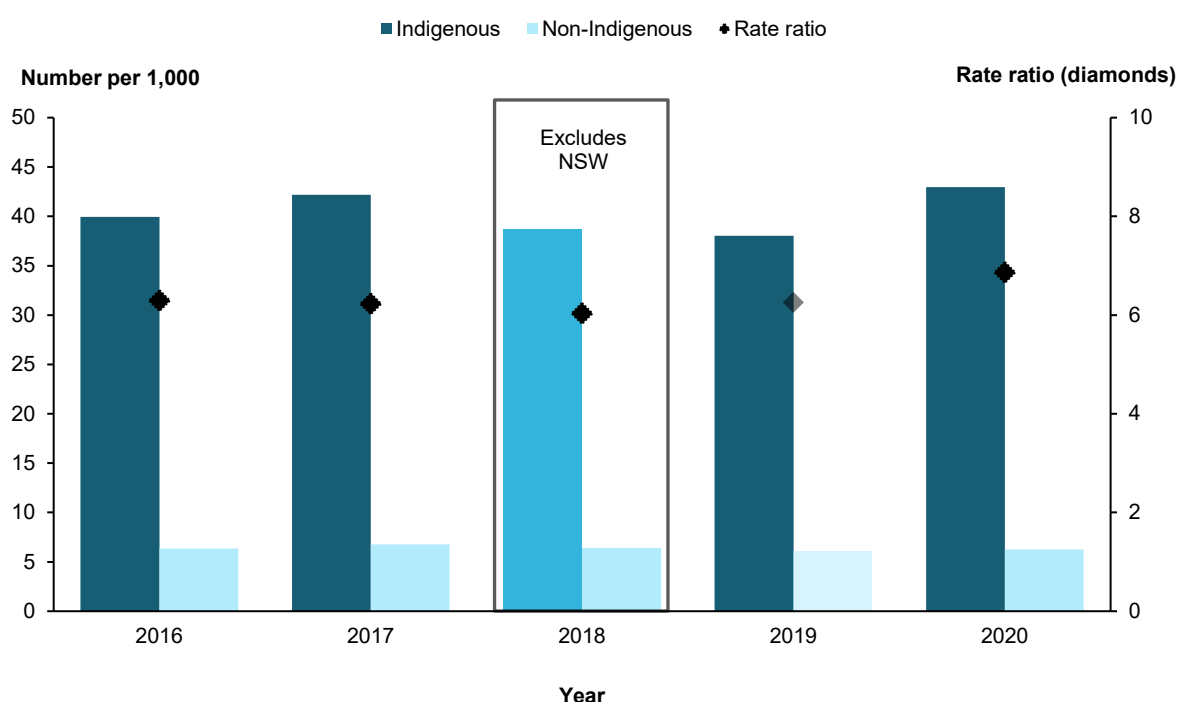
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S3.14, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The substantiations rate for Indigenous children is significantly higher than for non-Indigenous children. The substantiations rate for Indigenous children has risen from 40 per 1,000 children in 2015–16 to 43 per 1,000 children in 2019–20 with minor fluctuations during the period.

The substantiations rate for non-Indigenous children remained relatively stable from 2015–16 to 2019–20, remaining at 6 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children.

Figure 3.14: Trends in children who were the subjects of substantiations, by Indigenous status, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (rate and rate ratio)



Notes

1. Data 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 C (online) 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 Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates and rate ratios.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

4 Care and protection orders

Key findings

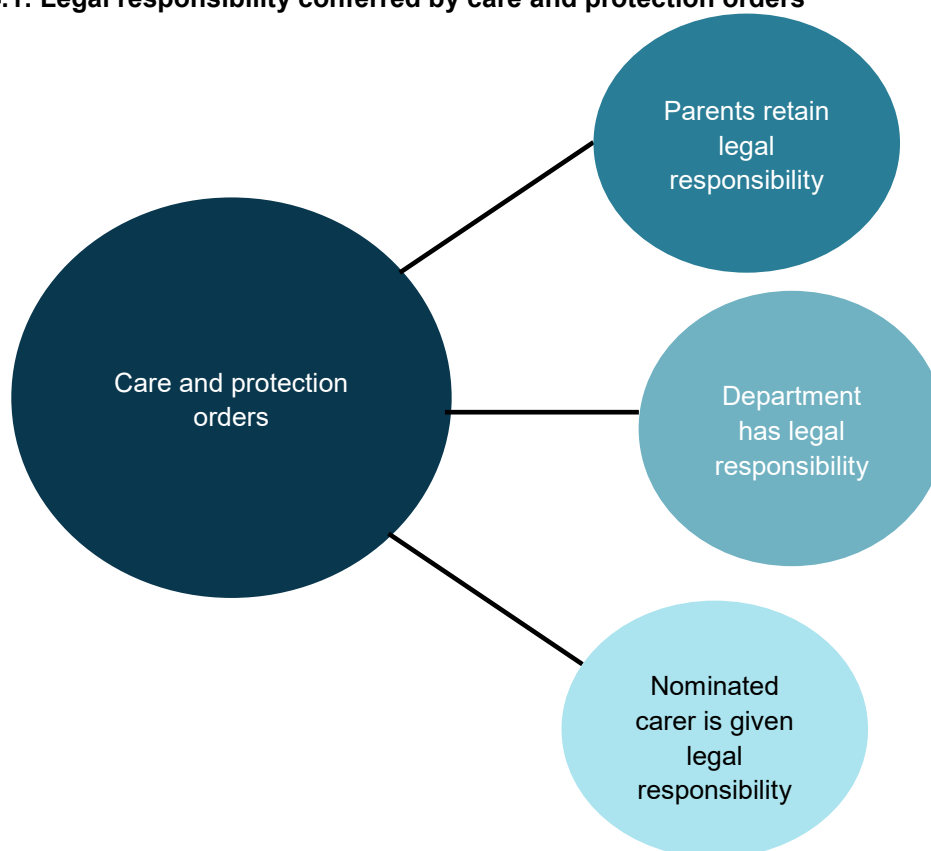
- Around 60,900 children were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2020.
- Of the 60,900 children on care and protection orders, 38% (23,300) were Indigenous.
- Of the 13,100 children admitted to orders in 2019–20, 9,900 (76%) were admitted for the first time.
- 11,800 children were discharged from care and protection orders in 2019–20.

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



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 guarantee 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, 29% of children who were the subjects of substantiations in 2018–19 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

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued): 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
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 (online) 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.

How many children were on care and protection orders?

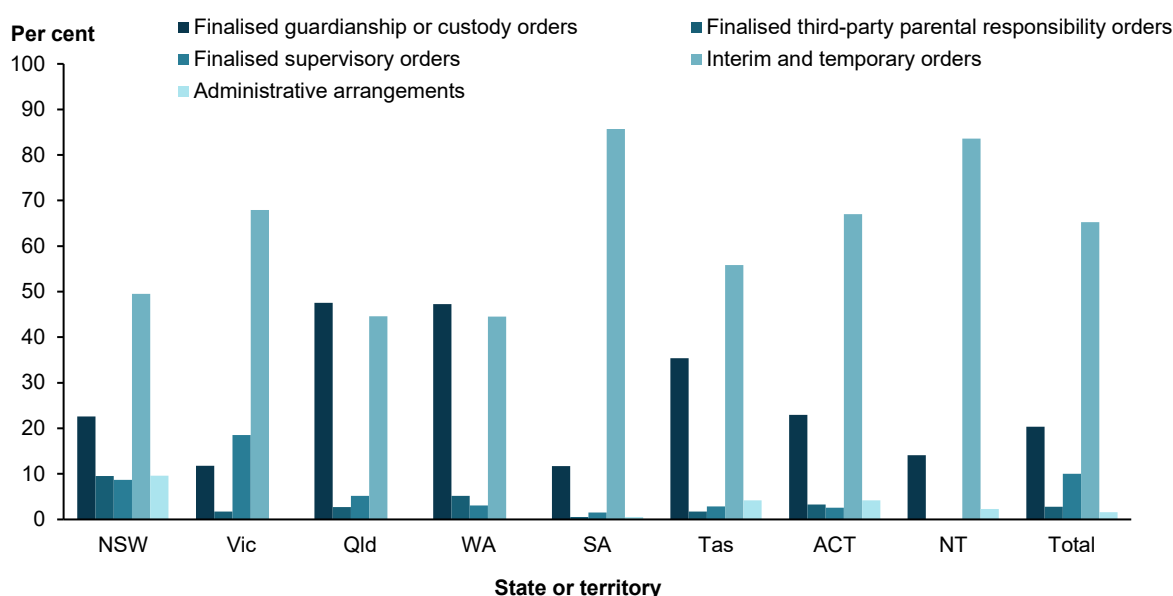
A child may receive multiple care and protection orders over the course of a single year. Each order is counted separately, but a child is counted for only 1 admission/discharge during the year. As a result, the counts of orders issued are much higher than the counts of children admitted to care and protection orders.

Care and protection orders issued

About 50,600 care and protection orders were issued in 2019–20. Of these, most were interim and temporary orders (65%, or 33,000) or finalised guardianship and custody orders (20% or 10,300).

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 percentage 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, 2019–20 (per cent)



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

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S4.1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Children admitted to and discharged from orders

In 2019–20, about 13,100 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, 2019–20 (number)

	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Children admitted to orders	2,051	5,484	2,781	1,192	890	312	138	214	13,062
Children admitted for the first time	1,756	3,965	2,179	819	788	166	111	148	9,932
Percentage of all admissions	85.6	72.3	78.4	68.7	88.5	53.2	80.4	69.2	76.0
Children discharged from orders	2,521	4,889	2,063	1,061	547	264	131	274	11,750

(a) New South Wales data do not include children on finalised supervisory orders.

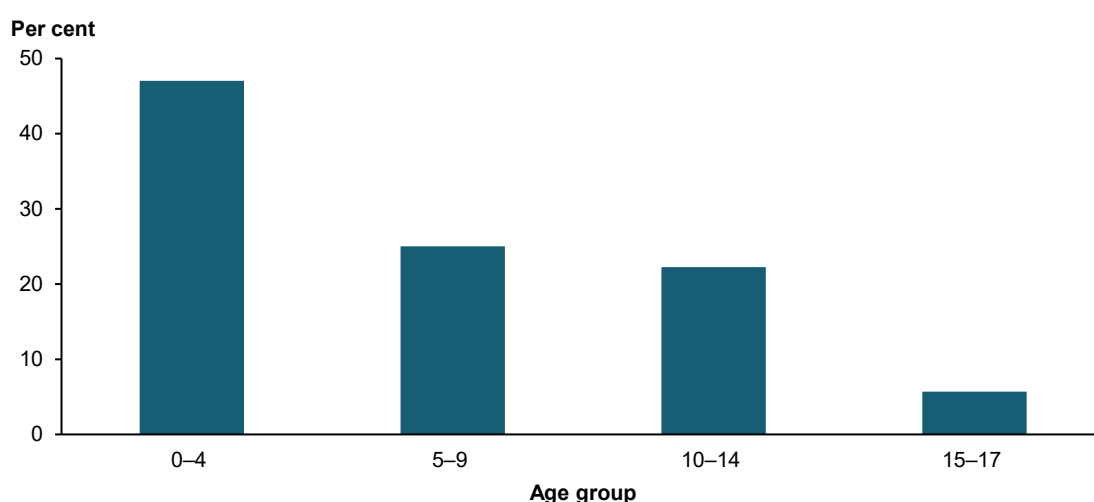
Notes

1. Data include children who were discharged on their 18th birthday.
2. For details on methodology used to count admissions and discharges from care and protection orders, see Appendix B (online).

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Almost half (47%) of children admitted to orders in 2019–20 were aged under 5 (Figure 4.3). This reflects the previously noted view that younger children are considered the most vulnerable. Age patterns were similar to those for substantiations of notifications, with fewer children admitted to orders as age increased.

Figure 4.3: Children admitted to care and protection orders, by age group, 2019–20 (per cent)



Note: For details on the methodology used to count admissions to care and protection orders, see Appendix B (online).

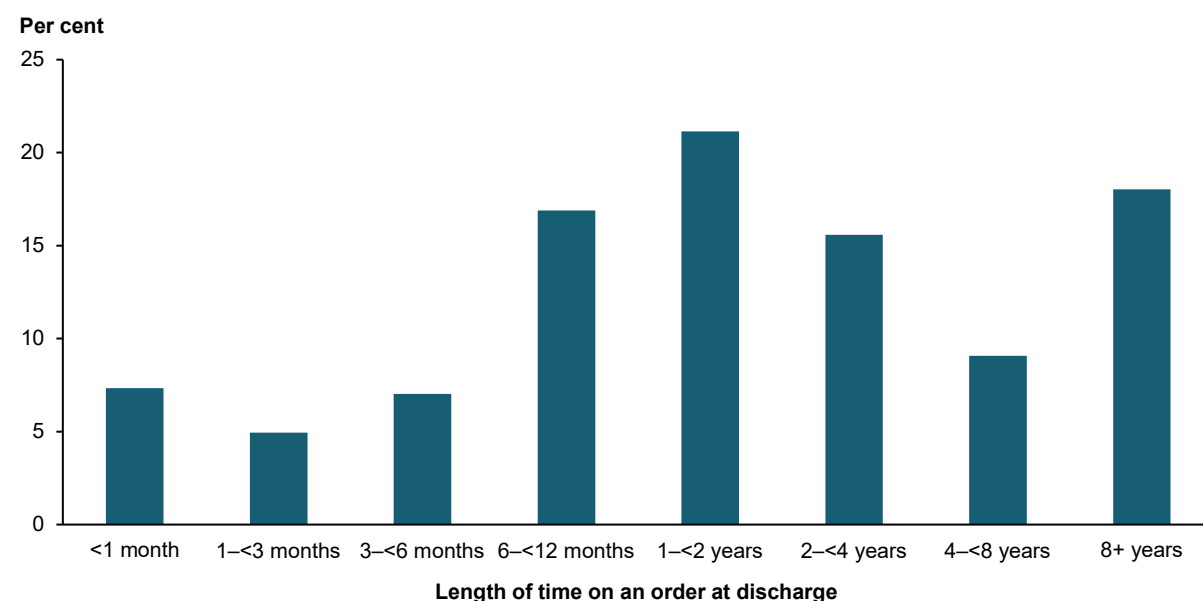
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S4.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Length of time on an order at discharge

Of the approximately 11,800 children discharged from care and protection orders in 2019–20:

- 7% were continuously on an order for less than 1 month
- 5% were continuously on an order for 1 to 3 months
- 21% were continuously on an order for 1 to 2 years
- 18% 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, 2019–20 (per cent)



Note: For details on the methodology used to count discharges from care and protection orders, see Appendix B (online).

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S4.4, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

At the time of discharge, Indigenous children were most likely to have been continuously on an order for 8 or more years (19% or 700) and non-Indigenous children (22% or 1,700) were most likely to have been continuously on an order for 1 to 2 years (excludes suppressed data for Tasmania, Supplementary table S4.4).

What were the characteristics of children on care and protection orders?

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

- children on offence orders, unless they are also on a care and protection order
- administrative and voluntary arrangements with the departments responsible for child protection that do not transfer custody or guardianship away from parents.

Nationally, at 30 June 2020, about 60,900 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 2020 (number and rate)

	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number	20,359	14,947	11,570	6,059	4,537	1,463	909	1,059	60,903
Number per 1,000	11.4	10.4	9.7	9.9	12.3	13.0	9.4	17.2	10.8

(a) New South Wales data do not include children on finalised supervisory orders.

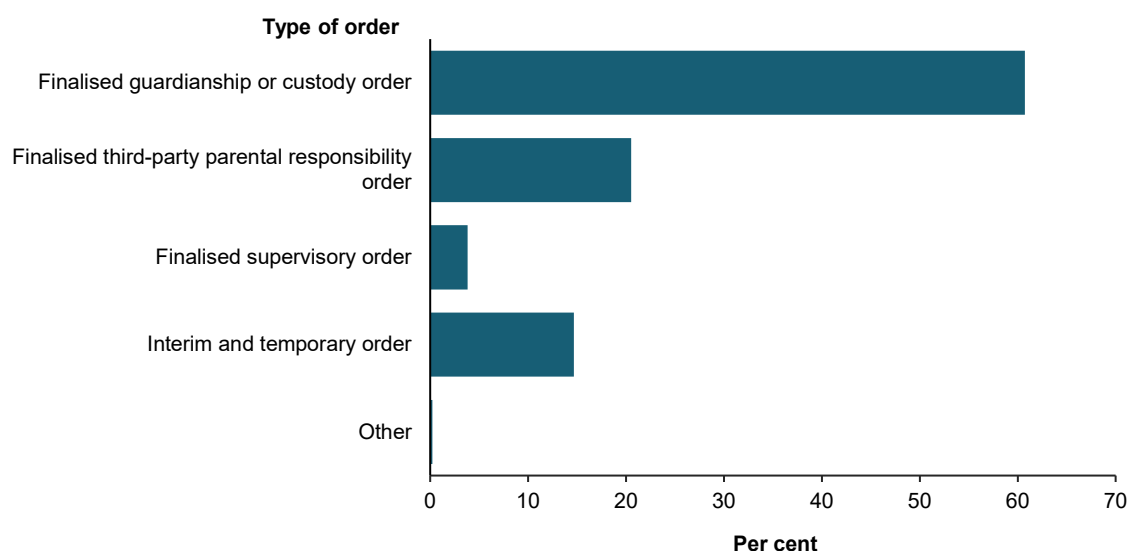
Note: See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Type of order

Of the approximately 60,900 children who were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2020, almost two-thirds (61% or 37,000) 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 2020 (per cent)



Source: Supplementary data table (online) S4.10, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

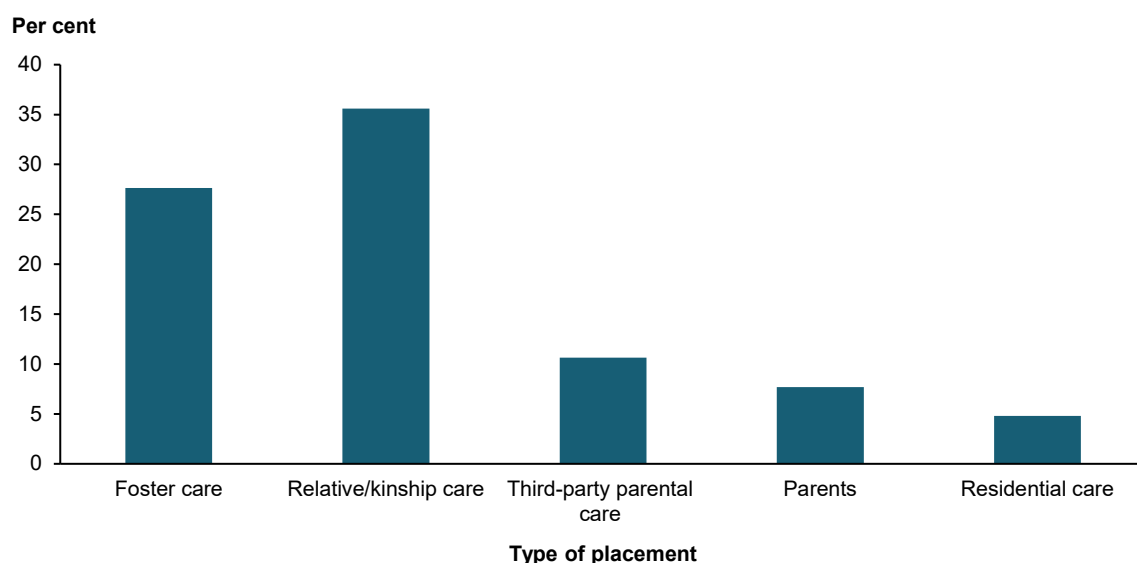
The type of order issued for each child depends upon many factors, such as the child's age; alternative care options available; the severity of harm to the child; the time period associated with various protection orders and/or the likelihood of the child remaining in care or being reunited with their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

Type of placement

At 30 June 2020, the majority (63%) of children on care and protection orders were placed with relative/kinship carers (36%) or in foster care (28%).

Smaller percentages of children were placed in third-party parental care arrangements (11%), with their parents (8%), or in residential care (5%) (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Children on care and protection orders, by type of placement, 30 June 2020 (per cent)



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

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S4.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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, and 96% of children on orders who were under 5 were living in family care, third-party parental care, or home-based care (Supplementary table S4.6).

Age and sex

Of the approximately 60,900 children on orders at 30 June 2020:

- 20% were aged under 5 (compared with 47% of children admitted to orders)
- 62% were aged 5–14
- 18% were aged 15–17 (Supplementary table S4.7)
- 51% were boys (Supplementary table S4.8).

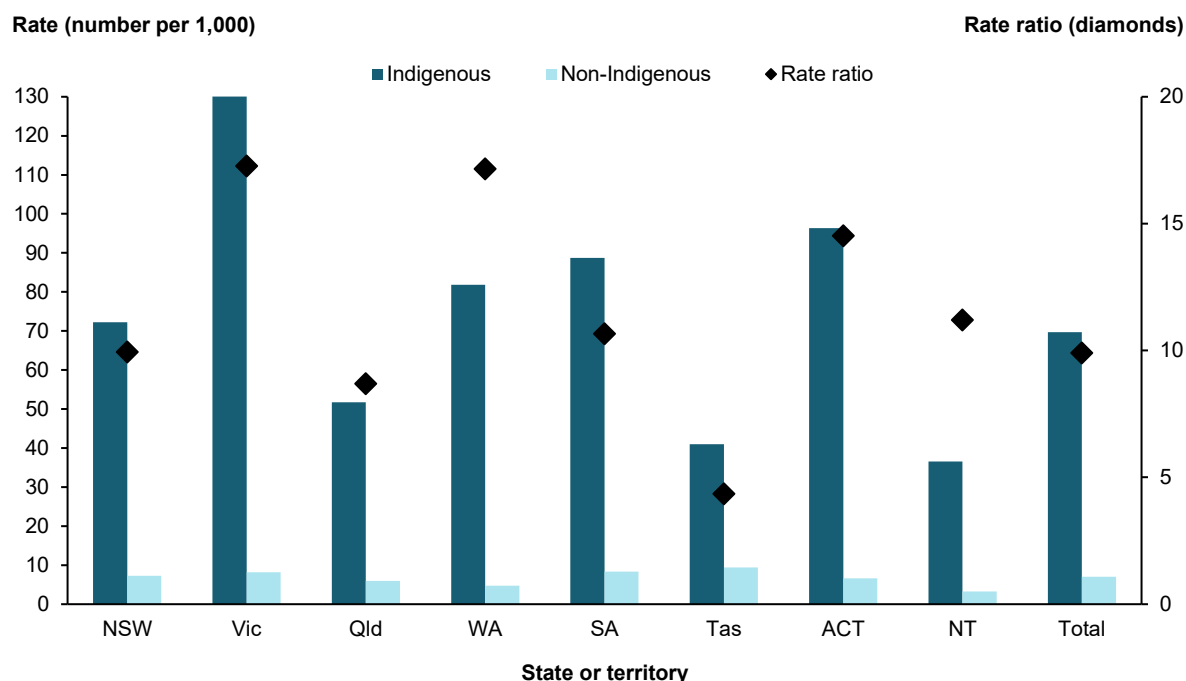
The age distribution of all children on orders at 30 June 2020 was older than that for children admitted to orders during 2019–20. This reflects that the number of children on orders at 30 June includes children who were admitted during previous years and remained on an order in 2020 (supplementary tables S4.3 and S4.7).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2020, 38% (23,300) of children on care and protection orders were Indigenous. Of these children, 68% (15,900) were on guardianship or custody orders (Supplementary table S4.10).

The rate of Indigenous children on orders was 70 per 1,000 Indigenous children, 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (7 per 1,000). The rate of Indigenous children on orders was higher than that for non-Indigenous children across all jurisdictions, with rate ratios varying across jurisdictions (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7: Children on care and protection orders, by Indigenous status and state or territory, 30 June 2020 (rate and rate ratio)



Note: See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates and rate ratios.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S4.9, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

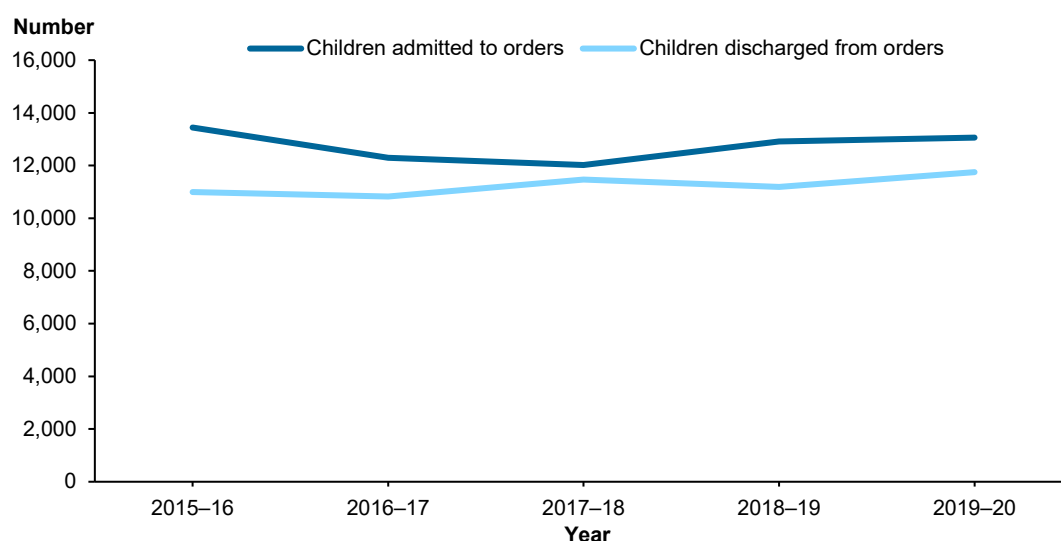
Has the use of care and protection orders changed over time?

Trends in children admitted to, and discharged from, orders

The number of children admitted to care and protection orders fluctuates each year, but overall has remained relatively stable between 2015–16 and 2019–20 (13,400 to 13,100) (Figure 4.8).

The number of children discharged from orders has increased 7% (from 11,000 in 2015–16 to 11,800 in 2019–20) (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8: Trends in children admitted to, and discharged from, care and protection orders, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (number)



Note: For details on the methodology used to count admissions and discharges from care and protection orders, see Appendix B (online).

Sources: Supplementary data tables (online) S4.11 and S4.12, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Trends in children on care and protection orders

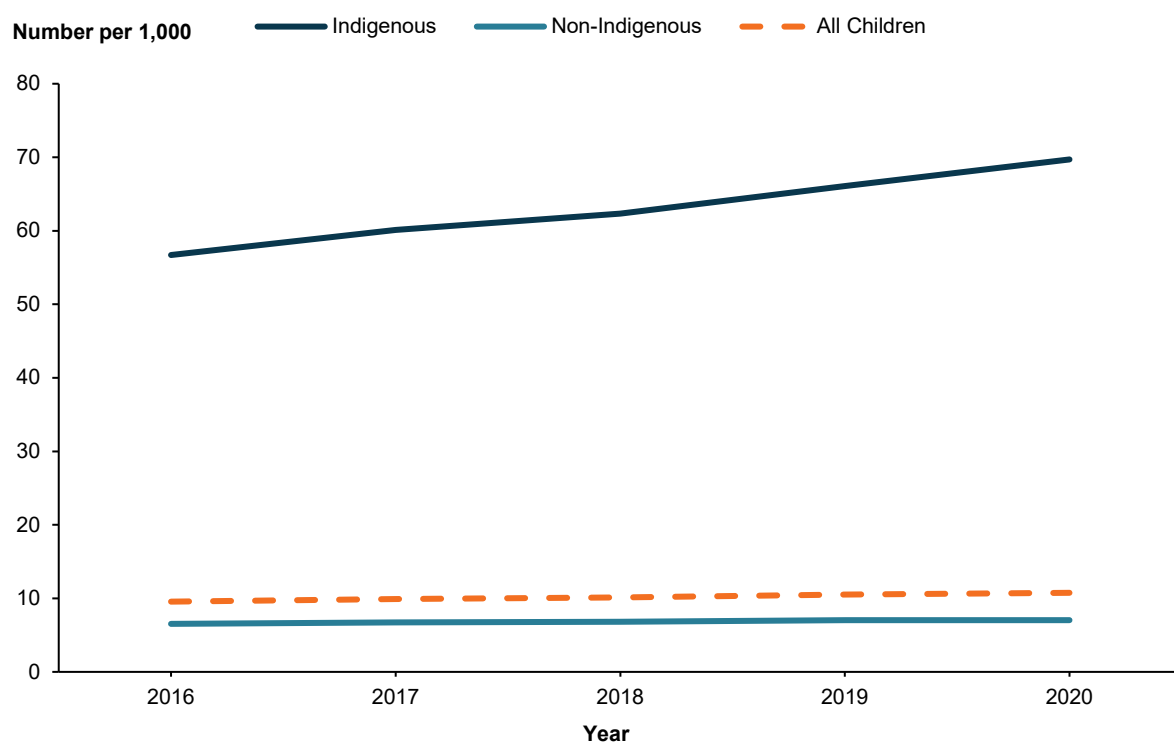
From 30 June 2016 to 30 June 2020, the rate of children aged 0–17 on care and protection orders rose from 10 to 11 per 1,000 children (Table A1).

Over the 5-year period, the number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders rose steadily, from 18,400 on 30 June 2016 to 23,300 on 30 June 2020, with rates rising from 57 to 70 per 1,000 Indigenous children.

While the number of non-Indigenous children on care and protection orders rose from 33,400 to 37,500 in the same period, the rate remained relatively stable at 7 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children (Figure 4.9).

The substantial increase in the rate of Indigenous children on orders has largely driven the rise in the overall rate of children on orders.

Figure 4.9: Trends in children on care and protection orders, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2016 to 30 June 2020 (rate)



Note: See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

5 Out-of-home care

Key findings

- There were about 46,000 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020.
- About 12,300 children were admitted to out-of-home care in 2019–20.
- About 11,200 children were discharged from out-of-home care in 2019–20.
- Around 30,600 children had been in out-of-home care for 2 years or more at 30 June 2020.
- About 1 in 18 (18,900) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020, 11 times the rate for non-Indigenous children.

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 because they are the subject of a substantiation and need a more protective environment. Children may also be placed in out-of-home care when parents are incapable of providing adequate care, when alternative accommodation is needed during times of conflict, or when parents/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 for 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

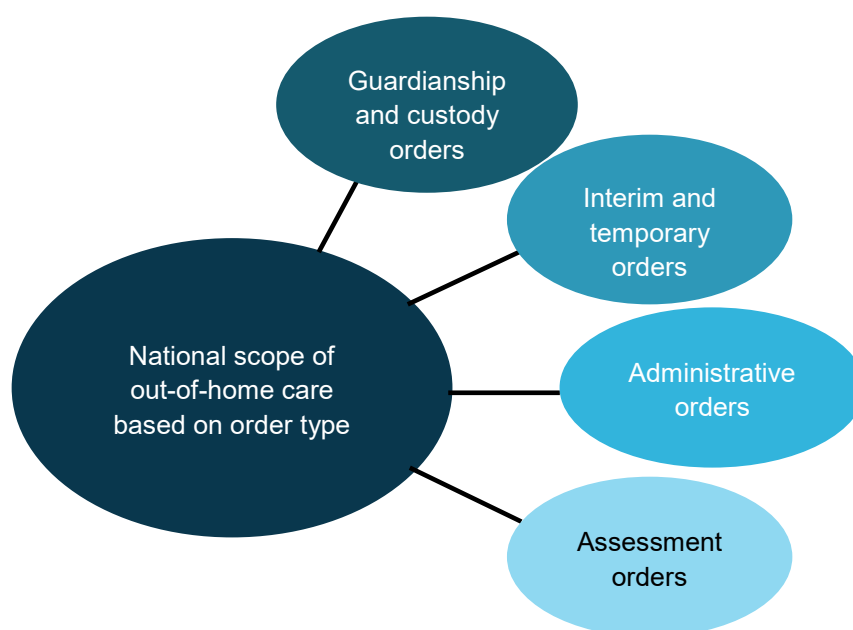
(continued)

Box 5.1 (continued): National definition for out-of-home care

- placements solely funded by disability services, psychiatric services, specialist homelessness services, juvenile justice facilities, or overnight child care 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 in scope for out-of-home care based on order type



When a national definition for out-of-home care was implemented in 2018–19, children on third-party parental responsibility orders were excluded from out-of-home care 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 2020, there were nearly 9,500 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 Chapter 6 Permanency.

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.

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

Nationally, approximately 46,000 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020—a rate of 8 per 1,000 children (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Children in out-of-home care, by state or territory, 30 June 2020 (number and rate)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Number	16,160	9,095	8,923	4,839	4,136	1,112	699	1,032	45,996
Number per 1,000	9.1	6.3	7.5	7.9	11.2	9.9	7.2	16.8	8.1

Note: See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: Table A1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Children admitted to and discharged from out-of-home care

In 2019–20, nationally:

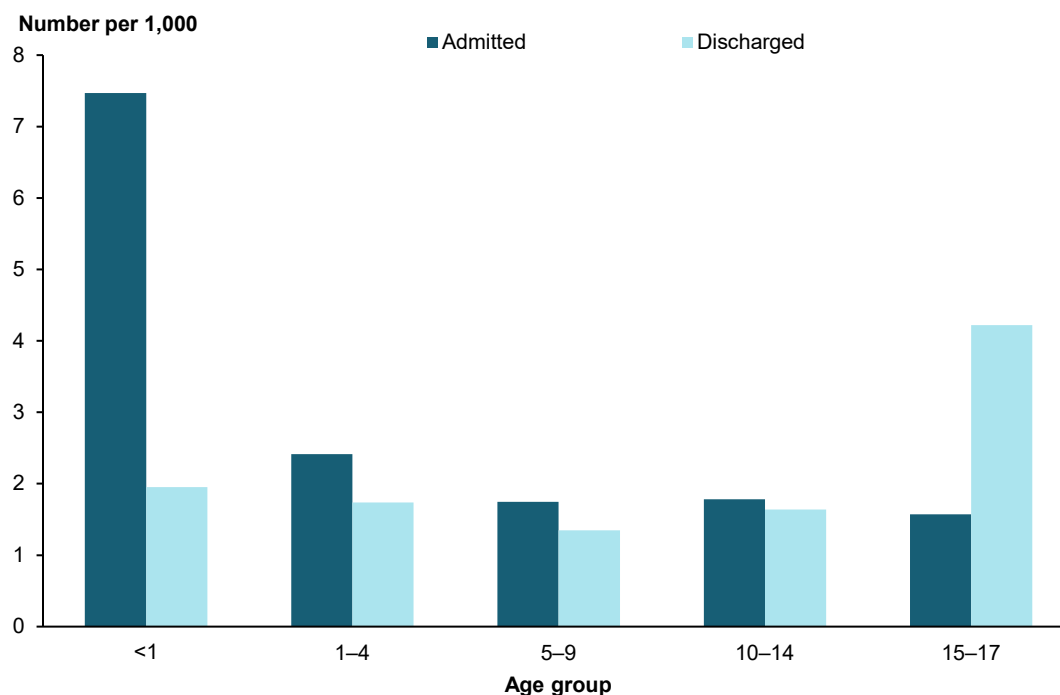
- about 12,300 children were admitted to out-of-home care—a rate of 2 per 1,000 children (Supplementary table S5.1)
- about 11,200 children were discharged from out-of-home care—a rate of 2 per 1,000 children (Supplementary table S5.2).

Age

In 2019–20, the rates of admission to out-of-home care were highest for the youngest children, at 7 per 1,000 for those aged under 1. Rates of admission to out-of-home care fell as age increased, with the lowest rate being for children aged 15–17 (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 1) (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Children admitted to, and discharged from, out-of-home care, by age group, 2019–20 (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 Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Sources: Supplementary data tables (online) S5.1 and S5.2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2019–20, about 4,600 Indigenous children were admitted to out-of-home care at a rate of 14 per 1,000 Indigenous children, 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (1 per 1,000 non-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 3,900 Indigenous children were discharged from out-of-home care. The rate of children discharged from out-of-home care during 2019–20 was also higher for Indigenous children (12 per 1,000 children) than for non-Indigenous children (1 per 1,000 children).

In 2019–20, Indigenous children aged under 1 were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children of the same age to be discharged from out-of-home care, and for those aged 10–14 the figure was 10 times as likely (excludes suppressed data for Tasmania, Supplementary table S5.2).

What types 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).

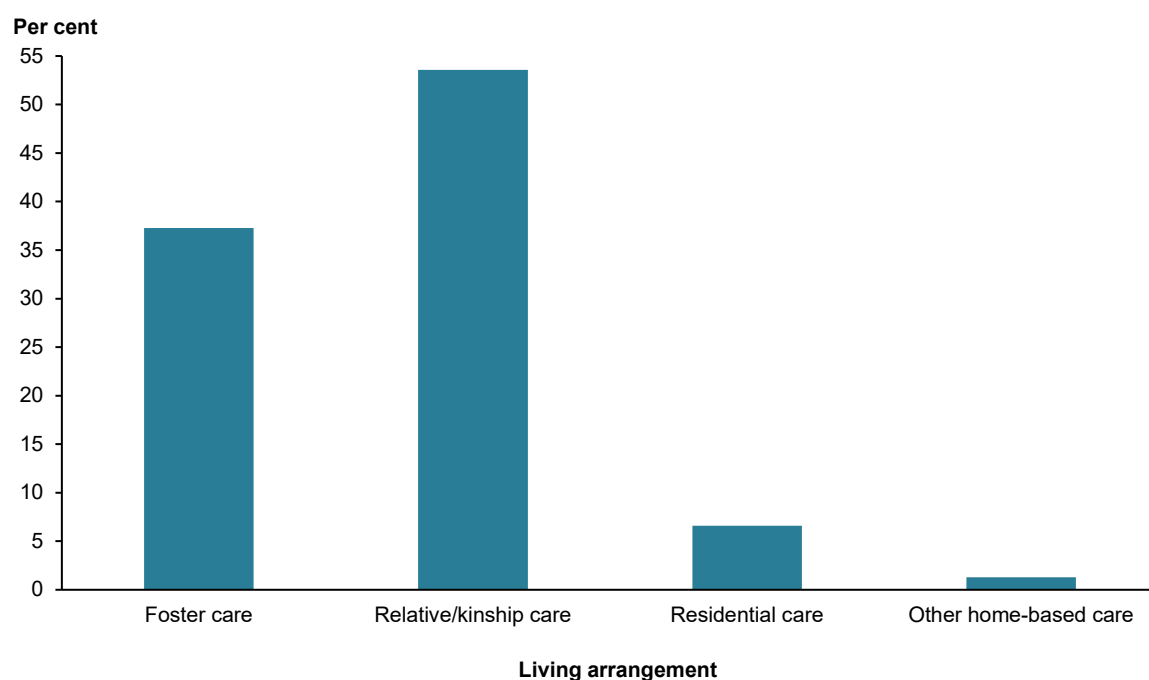
The vast majority of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020 (92% of around 46,000) were in home-based care. Of those in out-of-home care:

- 54% were in relative/kinship care
- 37% were in foster care
- 1% were in other types of home-based care (Supplementary table S5.3).

Data on the relationship of relative/kinship carers were available for only 4 jurisdictions, representing 35% of children placed with relative/kinship carers at 30 June 2020. For jurisdictions with available data, the most common placement was with grandparents (20%), followed by an aunt/uncle (8%). Only 3% of children in relative/kinship care were placed in a non-familial relationship (Supplementary table S5.4).

Nationally, about 7% 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 2020 (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).

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S5.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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.

What were the characteristics of children in out-of-home care?

Age and sex

Almost one-third (32%) of children in out-of-home care were aged 10–14, and a similar percentage were aged 5–9 (30%) (Supplementary table S5.5). Just over half (52%) of all children in out-of-home care were boys (Supplementary table S5.6).

Children in residential care were older than children in home-based care—86% of children in residential care or family group homes were aged 10 or over. The corresponding percentage of children aged 10 and over in home-based care was 44% (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.

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 2019–20, data on disability status was available for 57% of children in out-of-home care at 30 June. The available data show that about 15% of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020 were reported as having a disability (excludes South Australia) (Supplementary table S5.8).

Remoteness area

At 30 June 2020, 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).

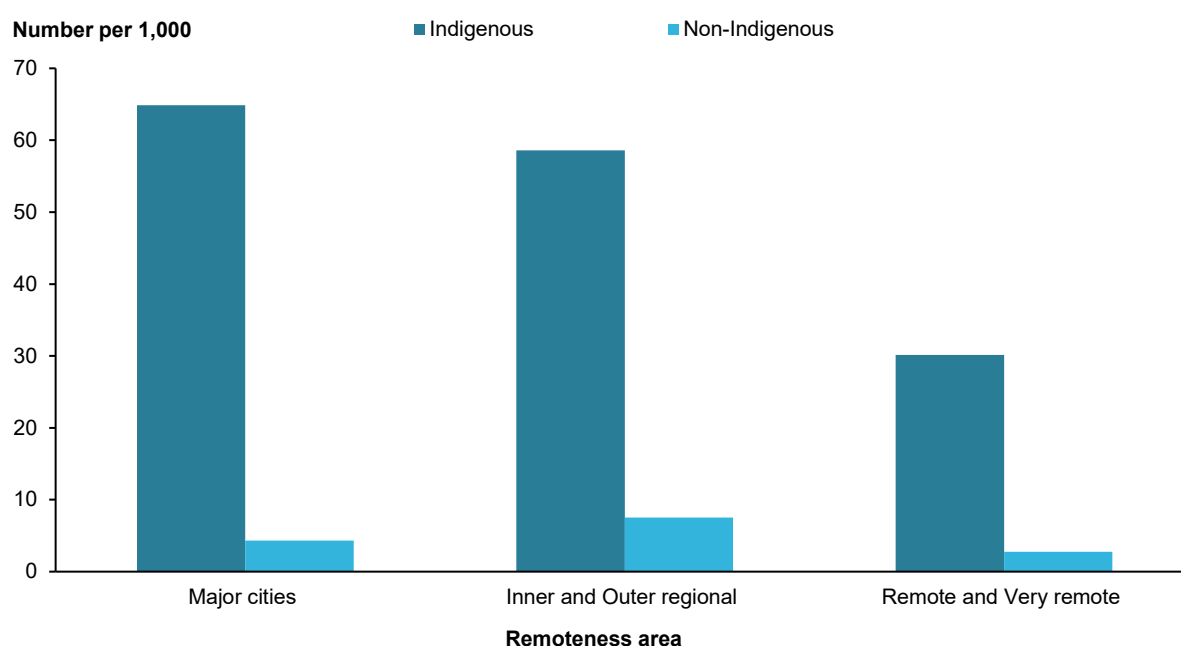
The rates for children in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were more than twice that of those in *Major cities* for children living in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020 (Supplementary table S5.9b).

The rates of Indigenous children in out-of-home care were much higher across all remoteness areas than the rates for non-Indigenous children (Figure 5.4).

Indigenous children living in *Major cities* were 15 times as likely as non-Indigenous children in *Major cities* to be in out-of-home care at 30 June—65 per 1,000 Indigenous children compared with 4 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children (Supplementary table S5.9b).

Indigenous children living in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were 11 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care.

Figure 5.4: Children in out-of-home care, by remoteness area and Indigenous status, 30 June 2020 (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 Appendix B (online) or ABS 2018.
2. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

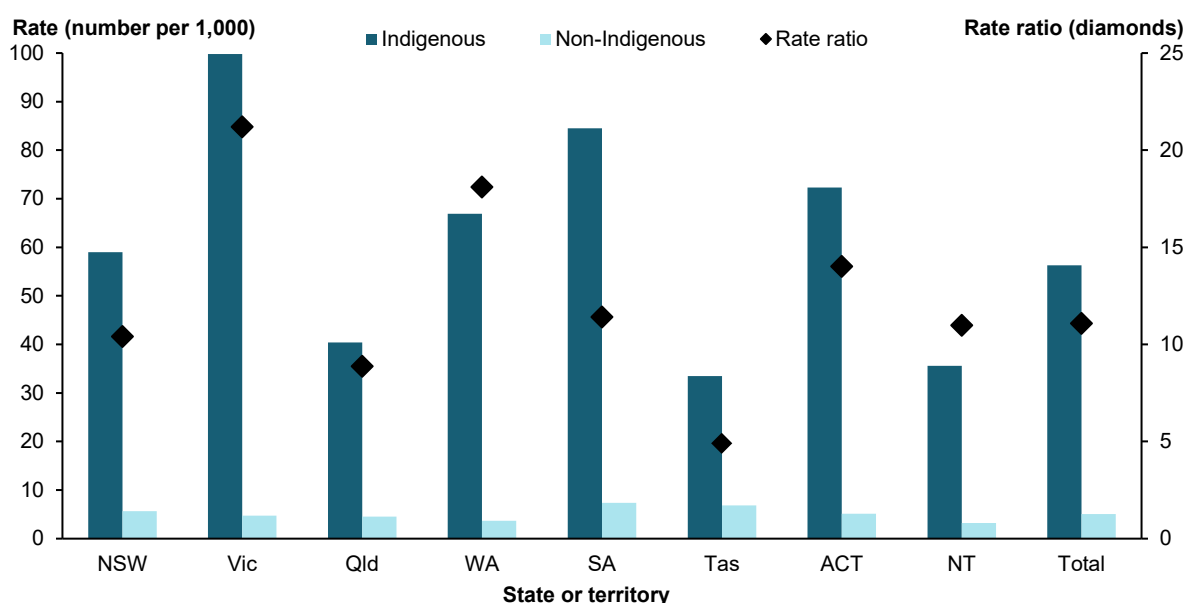
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S5.9b, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2020, about 18,900 Indigenous children were in out-of-home care—a rate of 56 per 1,000 Indigenous children, which was 11 times the rate for non-Indigenous children (Figure 5.5). This difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children was evident across all age groups (Supplementary table S5.11).

Rates for Indigenous children in out-of-home care varied by age groups. Indigenous children aged 10–14 had the highest rate of out-of-home care (63 per 1,000 Indigenous children), while those aged under 1 had the lowest rate (28 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 2020 (rate and rate ratio)



Note: See Appendix B (online) for the methodology used to calculate rate and rate ratios.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S5.10, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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 impact of the principle is reflected in the relatively high proportion of Indigenous children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives in many jurisdictions (Figure 5.6).

In 2019–20, 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 percentage 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 (Lock 1997; Tilbury et al. 2013).

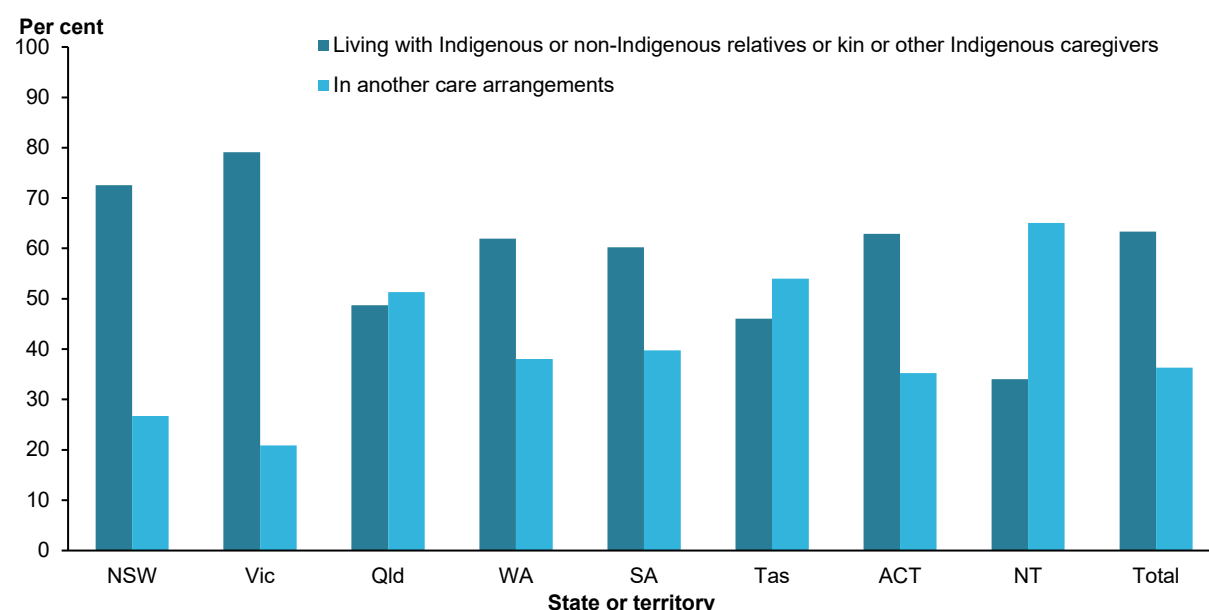
The principle has the following order of preference for the placement of Indigenous children:

- 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.

Figure 5.6: Indigenous children in out-of-home care, by relationship of carer and state or territory, 30 June 2020 (per cent)



Notes

1. Some counts for 2019–20 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 groups 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.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S5.12, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Care and protection order status

At 30 June 2020, nationally, of children in out-of-home care:

- 94% were also on care and protection orders
- 6% were not on an order (Supplementary table S5.13).

Length of time continuously in care

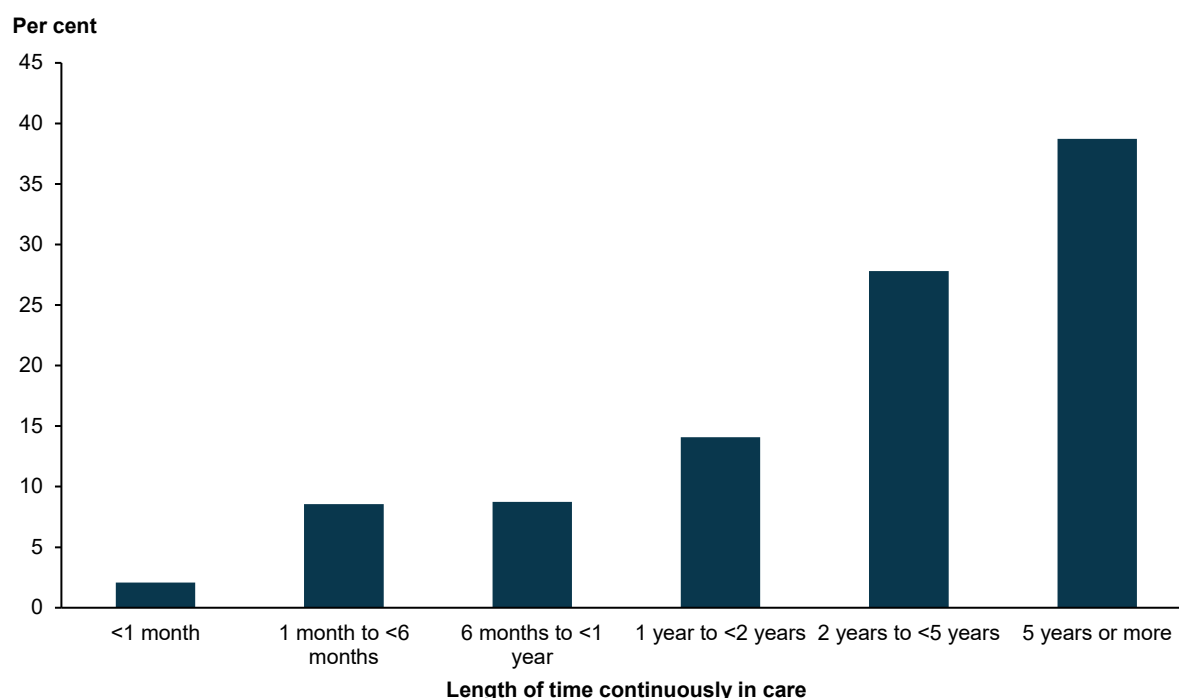
Of approximately 46,000 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020, most (81%) had been continuously in out-of-home care for 1 year or more (Supplementary table S5.14). This included:

- 28% who had been in out-of-home care for 2–5 years
- 39% who had been in out-of-home care for 5 years or more (Figure 5.7).

About 19% of children had been in out-of-home care for less than 1 year.

The proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in out-of-home care who had been continuously in care for 1 year or more were similar (82% and 80%, respectively).

Figure 5.7: Children in out-of-home care, by length of time continuously in care, 30 June 2020 (per cent)



Note: If a child has a return home or 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.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S5.14, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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. Chapter 6 reports on children who have exited out-of-home care to permanent care arrangements.

Age and Indigenous status

Approximately 30,600 (67%) of the 46,000 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020 had been in long-term care (2 years or more) (Supplementary table S5.14).

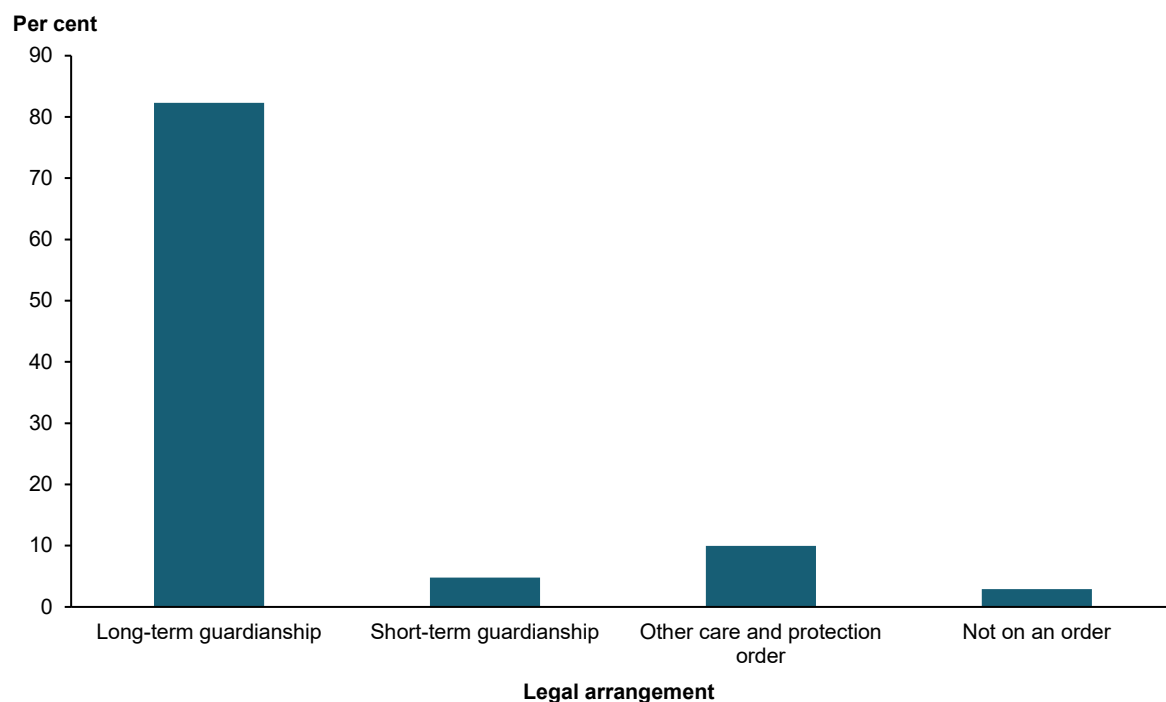
Most (69%) were aged 5–14 and 42% were Indigenous (Supplementary table S5.15).

Legal arrangement

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

- most (82%) were on long-term guardianship orders
- 5% were on short-term guardianship orders
- 10% were on other types of orders and 3% were not on an order (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8: Children in long-term out-of-home care, by legal arrangement, 30 June 2020 (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 2020.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S5.16, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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 (37%) or relative/kinship carer (37%) (excludes Tasmania, Supplementary table S5.16).

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.

Trends in children in out-of-home care

Between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2020, the number of children in out-of-home care rose 7% from 43,100 to 46,000.

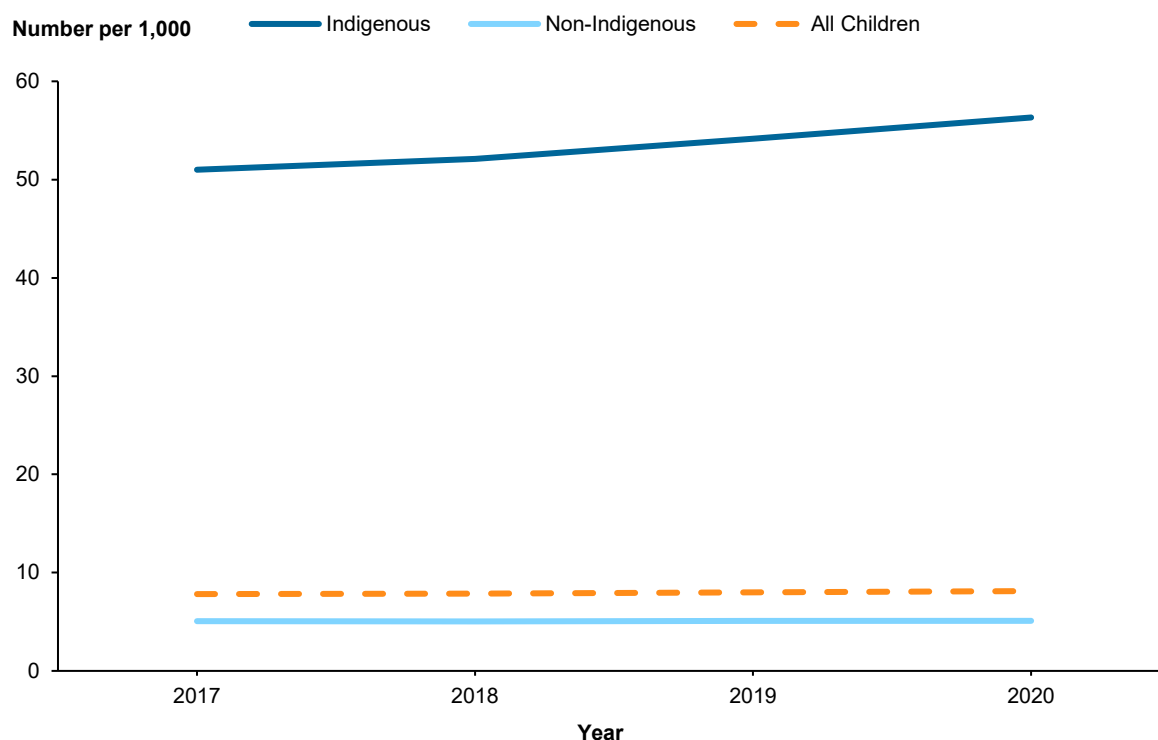
Nationally, the rate for children in out-of-home care has been relatively stable at 8 per 1,000 children from 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2020 (Supplementary table T2).

For state/territory trend data on the number and rate of children in out-of-home care between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2020, see Table A1.

For Indigenous children in out-of-home care, rates rose between 2017 and 2020, from 51 per 1,000 children to 56 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 2020 (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Children in out-of-home care, by Indigenous status, 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2020 (rate)



Notes

1. 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*.
2. See Appendix B (online) for the methodology used to calculate rates.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) T2, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Trends in children admitted to out-of-home care

Between 2016–17 and 2017–18, the number of children admitted to out-of-home care fell by 3% (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 (supplementary tables S5.17 and S5.18).

The overall rate of admissions remained relatively stable over the same 4 years, at about 2 per 1,000 children.

The number of admissions has consistently outnumbered discharges—in 2019–20, around 1,100 more children were admitted than were discharged (supplementary tables S5.18 and S5.20).

From 2016–17, the rate of Indigenous children admitted to out-of-home care rose from 12 to 14 per 1,000 children in 2019–20.

The rate of admissions for non-Indigenous children remained stable between 2016–17 and 2019–20, at 1 per 1,000 (Supplementary table S5.17).

Trends in children discharged from out-of-home care

The number of children discharged from out-of-home care rose from around 10,300 in 2016–17 to around 11,200 in 2019–20, with a slight drop in 2017–18.

Over the 4 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 2019–20, whereas the rate for non-Indigenous children was relatively stable at 1 per 1,000 (Supplementary table S5.19).

Between 2016–17 and 2019–20, the rates of children aged 15–17 discharged from out-of-home care were consistently higher than for any other age group.

6 Permanency

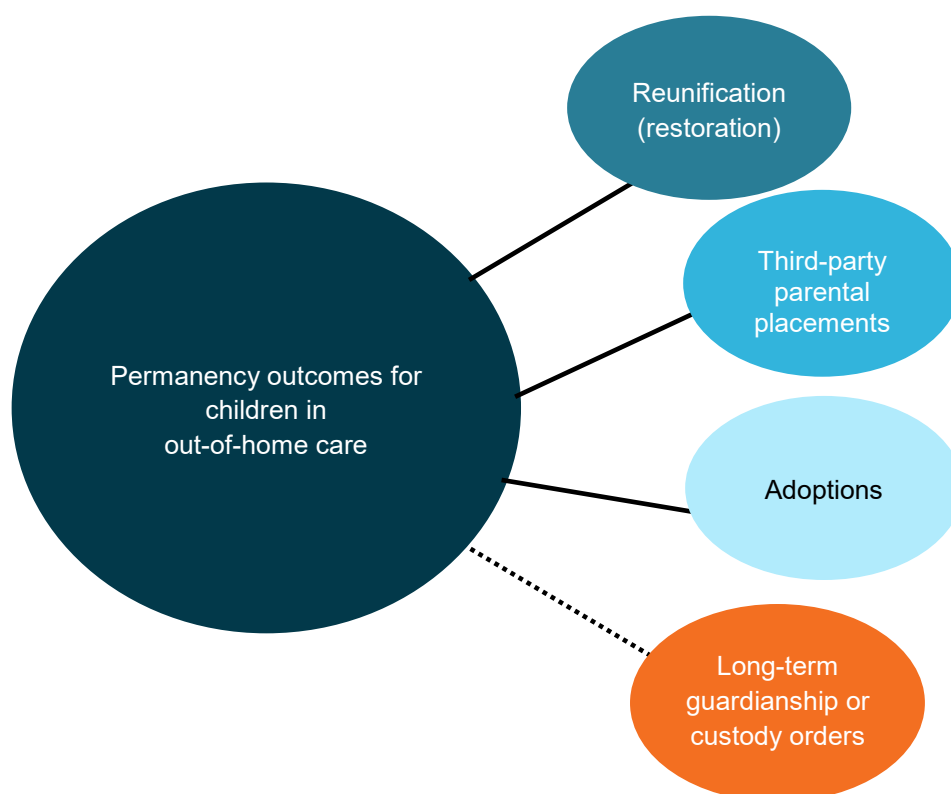
Key findings

- Of the 6,700 children exiting out-of-home care to a permanency outcome during 2019–20, around 5,300 were reunified with family, 1,200 were placed in a third-party parental care arrangement and 162 were adopted.
- Of the children in out-of-home care on 30 June 2020, who had been in care for at least 2 years, 82% (25,200) were on long-term guardianship orders.
- Of the children in out-of-home care placements for 2 or more years at 30 June 2020, 89% (nearly 27,400) were in the main care arrangement for 2 years or more.

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).

Figure 6.1: Permanency events



Note: Refer to the glossary for an explanation of items.

In Australia, most states and territories prioritise specific permanency-related actions and timeframes in children's case planning. By incorporating permanency goals into a child's

case planning, jurisdictions can actively seek the most suitable immediate placement, while preparing for long-term care arrangements and better developmental outcomes. The timeframe for reunification varies across jurisdictions, but for most jurisdictions, if a child is not reunified within 2 years then a long-term, stable placement will be pursued (see Appendix G in *Child protection Australia 2018–19* for more information).

In August 2017, Community Services ministers committed to:

...reduce state guardianship of children in out of home care by securing permanency outcomes, including adoption, for children who cannot be safely reunified with their families within a reasonable time to ensure abused and neglected children are not denied the right to grow up in a family that is permanent, stable and safe (Seselja 2017).

Given the importance of ensuring stability and permanency for children, ministers agreed to measure their progress through a national data and evaluation framework, since named the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (Prentice 2018) (see Box 6.1).

Box 6.1: Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework

The Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework provides objective measurements of performance in out-of-home care with regard to permanency in 4 domains.

Domain 1: Permanent, safe and stable care

Vulnerable children who are at risk of entering, or who have experienced out-of-home care have permanent, safe and stable care.

Outcomes:

- Families are supported to allow children to remain at home following the substantiation of a child concern report whenever it is safe to do so.
- Children in out-of-home care are reunified with their parents, families, or former guardian whenever it is safe to do so.
- Children in out-of-home care who are unable to live with their parents, families or former guardian achieve a permanent care arrangement.
- Children in a permanent care arrangement feel safe and secure.
- Children in out-of-home care have as few placements as possible.

Domain 2: Timely and informed decision making

Vulnerable children who have experienced out-of-home care have timely decision making on permanency that takes into account the views of the child.

Outcomes:

- Children are included in decision making about their permanency arrangements.
- Children receive timely decisions about their permanency arrangements.

(continued)

Box 6.1 (continued): Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework

Domain 3: Achieve better life outcomes and realise their full potential

Vulnerable children who have experienced out-of-home care achieve better life outcomes and realise their full potential.

Outcomes:

- Children have strong physical, social and mental health.
- Children attend, participate and achieve in quality education or employment.
- Children leave care equipped for the future.

Domain 4: Lifelong relationships, belonging, identity and connection

Vulnerable children who have experienced out-of-home care have lifelong relationships and a sense of belonging, identity and connection to their culture and their community.

Outcomes:

- Children have a connection with their family.
- Children have their cultural needs identified and responded to.
- Children are living within their cultural community.
- Children feel a sense of identity and belonging to family, culture and community.

How are permanency outcomes measured?

This chapter presents 15 indicators covering the first 2 domains of the Permanency Outcomes Performance Framework (see Table 6.1). States and territories are working to enhance their reporting capabilities for future permanency reporting for Domains 3 and 4.

Domain 1 includes some contextual indicators of children in out-of-home care and duration in care as well as aspects of permanency planning and outcomes: preservation, reunification and permanent care, and placement stability.

Preservation means that children will remain at home following the substantiation of a child concern report.

Reunification (also known as restoration) means a return to the parent/guardian and environment from which the child was removed through the child protection process. As such, reunification is mainly with birth parents. Due to a lack of a nationally agreed definition for reunifications, current reporting by jurisdictions is based on local definitions.

Permanency outcomes are also achieved through third-party parental responsibility orders, which grant guardianship to a third party that is not the minister/executive, and adoptions. Placement stability is measured by looking at data on children not returning to out-of-home care after having exited through 1 of these permanency events in the previous reporting period.

Domain 2 includes indicators on timely decision-making.

As well as reporting on the number and characteristics (age, Indigenous status, time in care) of children exiting to these events in a given reporting period, the Framework also measures how many children return to out-of-home care after having exited through 1 of these permanency events in the previous reporting period.

Table 6.1: Permanency Indicators 2019–20: national summary

Indicator number and name		National data
Domain 1 Permanent, safe and stable care		
1.1a	The number and rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020	Nearly 46,000 children in care (8 per 1,000 children) (Supplementary table S5.5)
1.1b	The number and proportion of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020, by continuous time in out-of-home care	67% had been in care for 2 years or more (Supplementary table S5.14)
Preservation		
1.2	The proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in 2018–19 who were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of substantiation	81% (supplementary tables S6.1, S6.2)
Reunification and permanent care		
1.3	The proportion of children aged 0 to 17 in out-of-home care who were reunified with family during 2019–20	19% (supplementary tables S6.3, S6.4)
1.4	The proportion of children aged 0 to 17 in out-of-home care who exited to a third-party parental care arrangement in 2019–20	2% (supplementary tables S6.5, S6.6)
1.5	The proportion of children aged 0 to 17 who were adopted from out-of-home care during 2019–20	<1%
1.6	The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome in 2018–19 and did not return within 12 months	86% (supplementary tables S6.7, S6.8)
1.6a	The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who were reunified in 2018–19 and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months	83% (supplementary tables S6.9, S6.10)
1.6b	The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental care arrangement in 2018–19 and did not return within 12 months	99%
1.6c	The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who were adopted from out-of-home care in 2018–19 and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months	99%
Stability (legal, placement and relationship)		
1.7a	The proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June by legal and living arrangement	82% on long-term guardianship orders (Supplementary table S5.16)
1.7b	The proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June by continuous time in out-of-home care and the number of placements in the last 2 years (placement stability)	71% of children had only 1 placement (supplementary tables S6.11, S6.12)
1.7c	The proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June by time spent in the main care arrangement (care arrangement of the longest duration) (relationship stability)	90% of children had spent more than 2 years in their main placement (Supplementary table S6.13)
Domain 2 Timely and informed decision-making on permanency		
2.1	Time from admission to out-of-home care to achieving a finalised care and protection order	76% of children achieved a finalised care and protection order within 12 months of admission (Supplementary table S6.14)
2.2	Time from admission to out-of-home care to achieving a permanency outcome	56% of children achieved a permanency outcome within 12 months (supplementary tables S6.15, S6.16)

Box 6.2 outlines data limitations and comparability issues for reporting on permanency.

Box 6.2: 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 indicators can be affected by different thresholds (for example, for substantiation) across jurisdictions, which can affect comparability and interpretation.

Further insights into the permanency data can be found in Appendix B (available online) which outlines the methodology for permanency reporting.

The indicators presented in this chapter relate to a number of permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care. Detailed information on children in out-of-home care, including trends over time and population groups, is provided in Chapter 5.

Permanent, safe and stable care

Indicator 1.1a: The number and rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020

- At 30 June 2020, about 46,000 children were in out-of-home care (8 per 1,000 children) (see Chapter 5, Table 5.1), including nearly 19,000 Indigenous children (56 per 1,000 Indigenous children) (Supplementary table S5.5).

Indicator 1.1b: The number and proportion of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020, by continuous time in out-of-home care

- Nationally, the majority (67% or 30,600) of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020 had been in care for 2 years or more (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.7). This pattern was similar in all jurisdictions, except in Victoria where less than half (48%) the children in care had been in care for 2 or more years (Supplementary table S5.14).

Preservation

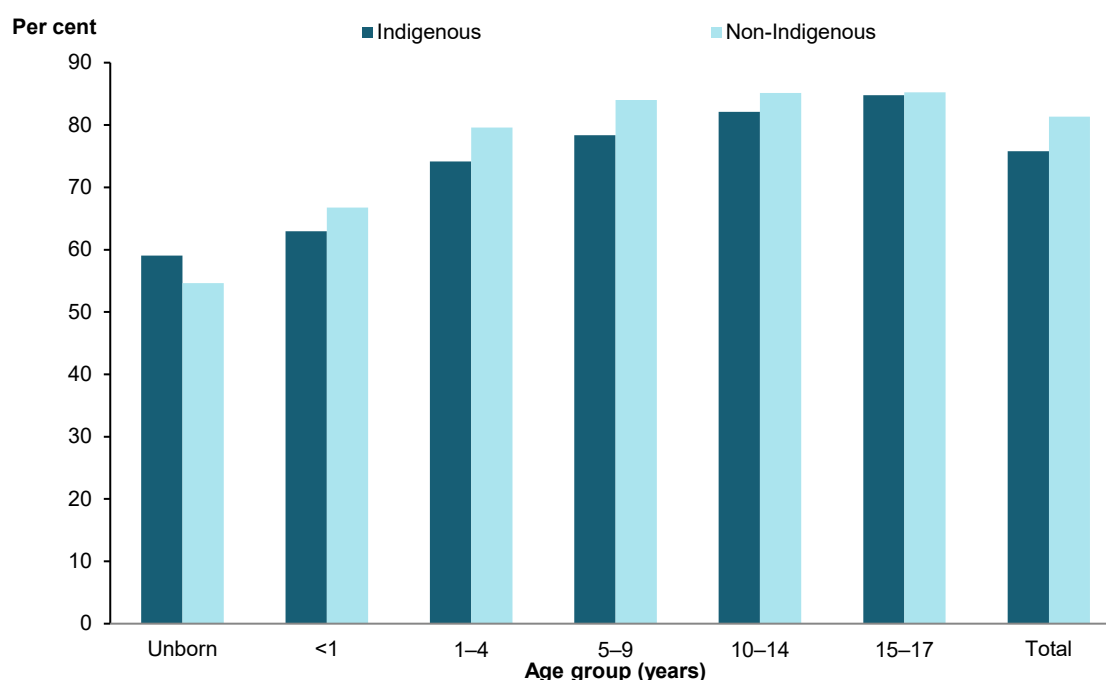
Preservation is a priority in permanency planning and aims to keep children in their home in a safe, stable and nurturing family wherever possible. It is also about preventing unnecessary entry into out-of-home care, through early intervention and effective family support. The effective provision of such services would see an increase in the number of children who did not enter out-of-home care following the substantiation of a child concern report.

Indicator 1.2: The proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in 2018–19 who were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of substantiation

The number of children who were subject of a substantiation in this indicator is based on the previous financial year to allow for 12 months to elapse from the time of the substantiation. This indicator operates as a proxy for preservation, but different thresholds for substantiation in each jurisdiction affect its comparability. In addition, preservation may not always be considered an ideal outcome for the child, and this can complicate the interpretation of the indicator.

- In 2018–19, 47,700 children were the subject of a substantiation and were not in out-of-home care at the time of notification. Of these children, 38,600 (81%) were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of substantiation (supplementary tables S6.1 and S6.2).
- The proportion of Indigenous children not being admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of a substantiation was 76% compared with 81% for non-Indigenous children (Supplementary table S6.1 and Figure 6.2).
- A higher proportion of children in older age groups were not admitted to out-of-home care when compared to younger age groups (Supplementary table S6.1 and Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Children who were the subject of a substantiation in 2018–19 and were not admitted to out-of-home care within 12 months of substantiation, by Indigenous status and age group (per cent) (Indicator 1.2)



Notes

1. Population scope is limited to children aged 0–16 at time of substantiation, to allow for 12 months of follow-up data.
2. Substantiations arising from notifications that occur while a child is in out-of-home care are excluded.

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S6.1, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Reunification and permanent care

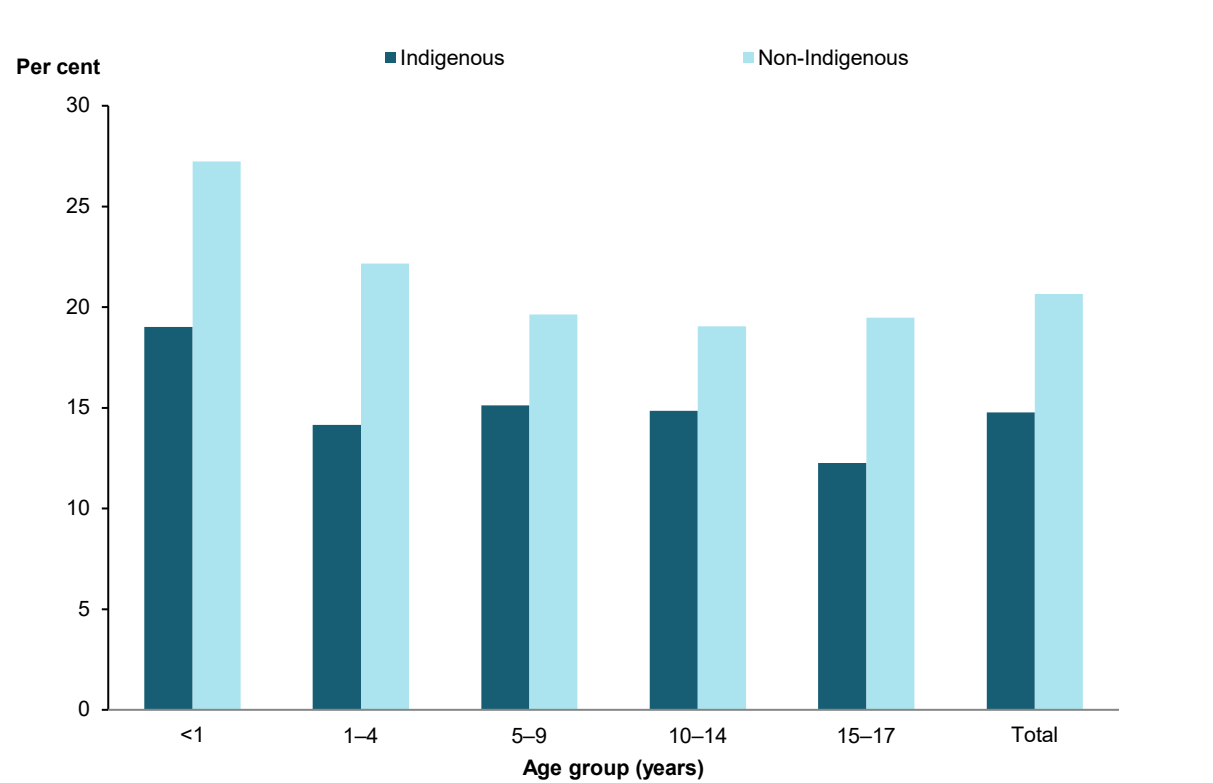
In 2019–20, about 6,700 children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome such as reunification with family, placement in a third-party parental care arrangement or adoption (supplementary tables S6.3 and S6.5 and Indicator 1.5 below).

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 the context of these indicators, reunification is considered permanency (see Indicator 1.6a for reunification success).

Indicator 1.3: The proportion of children aged 0 to 17 in out-of-home care who were reunified with family during 2019–20

- In 2019–20, there were about 28,900 children in out-of-home care, excluding those on long-term guardianship or custody orders, for whom reunification was a possibility. Of these children, over 5,300 (19%) were reunified during this time (supplementary tables S6.3 and S6.4).
- Reunification rates were lower for Indigenous children compared with non-Indigenous children (15% and 21%, respectively). This was consistent across all age groups (Supplementary table S6.3 and Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: Children reunified with family from out-of-home care in 2019–20, by Indigenous status and age group (per cent) (Indicator 1.3)



Note: Children on long-term guardianship orders were excluded from the denominator when calculating reunification rates (see Appendix B (online) for technical specifications).
Source: Supplementary data table (online) S6.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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

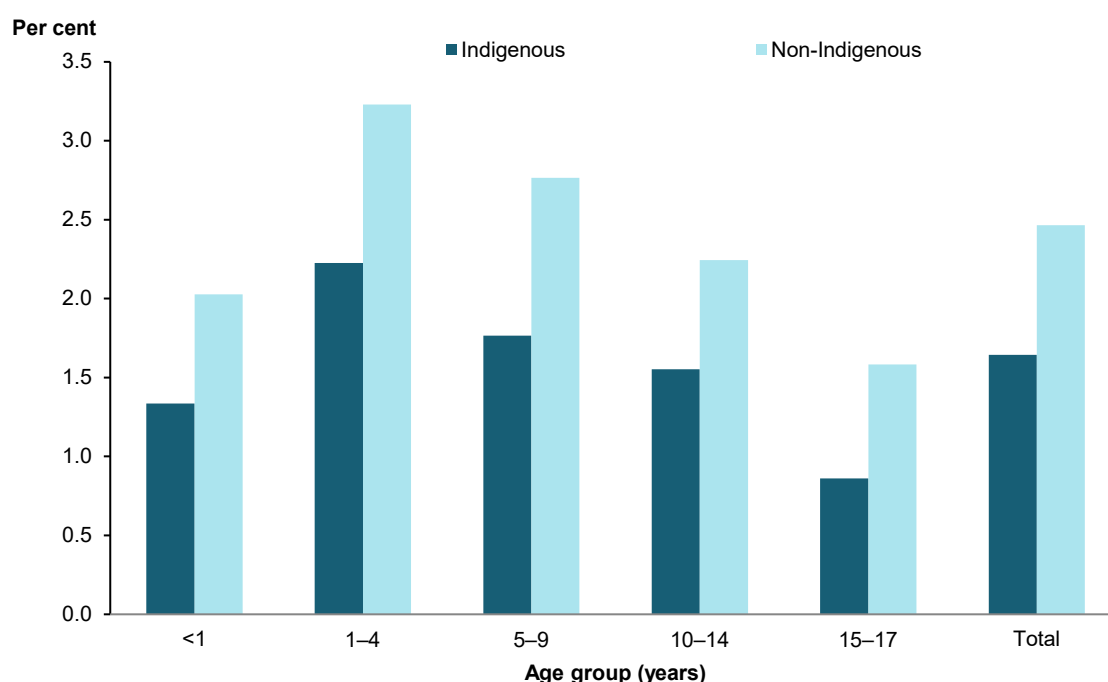
pursued only when safe reunification is not possible, or when alternative care has been deemed the most suitable way to achieve stability for the child.

At 30 June 2020, there were 9,500 children on third-party parental responsibility orders. This number rose from 8,200 at 30 June 2017 (Supplementary table T3). For state/territory trend data on the number and rate of children on third-party parental responsibility orders between 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2020, see Supplementary table T3.

Indicator 1.4: The proportion of children aged 0 to 17 in out-of-home care who exited to a third-party parental care arrangement in 2019–20

- Nearly 1,200 children (2% of children in care during the reporting period) left out-of-home care to a third-party parental care arrangement during 2019–20 (supplementary tables S6.5 and S6.6).
- A higher proportion of non-Indigenous children left out-of-home care to a third-party parental care arrangement (1.6% for Indigenous and 2.5% for non-Indigenous), with a similar pattern present for all age groups (Supplementary table S6.5 and Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Children exiting out-of-home care to third-party parental care arrangements in 2019–20, by Indigenous status and age group (per cent) (Indicator 1.4)



Source: Supplementary data table (online) S6.5, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Indicator 1.5: The proportion of children aged 0 to 17 who were adopted from out-of-home care during 2019–20

- In 2019–20, there were 162 known-carer adoptions from out-of-home care (AIHW Child Protection Collection).

Success of permanency is marked by the fact that the child did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months of their permanency event. A child is considered to have not returned to out-of-home care if, following an exit, a new episode of out-of-home care is not

commenced within 12 months. If a child has multiple exits to a permanency event during a reporting period, only the last event in the reporting period is counted.

Indicator 1.6: The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome in 2018–19 and did not return within 12 months

The number of children who exited out-of-home care in this indicator is based on the previous financial year to allow for 12 months to elapse from the time of exit.

- In 2018–19, about 6,400 children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome. Of these children, over 5,500 (86%) did not return to care within 12 months (supplementary tables S6.7 and S6.8).
- Nationally, 84% of Indigenous and 87% of non-Indigenous children exited out-of-home care to a permanency outcome in 2018–19 and did not return to care within 12 months (Supplementary table S6.7).

Indicator 1.6a: The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who were reunified in 2018–19 and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months

- Of the 5,300 children who were reunified in 2018–19, 4,400 (83%) did not return to care within 12 months, though this proportion varied by the time the child had been in care, Indigenous status and age (supplementary tables S6.9 and S6.10).

Indicator 1.6b: The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who exited out-of-home care to a third-party parental care arrangement in 2018–19 and did not return within 12 months

- Nearly all (99%) children who exited out-of-home care in 2018–19 to a third-party parental care arrangement did not return within 12 months (AIHW Child Protection Collection).

Indicator 1.6c: The proportion of children aged 0 to 16 who were adopted from out-of-home care in 2018–19 and did not return to out-of-home care within 12 months

- Nearly all (99%) children who were adopted from out-of-home care in 2018–19 did not return within 12 months (AIHW Child Protection Collection).

Stability (legal, placement and relationship)

State and territory policies relating to permanency planning suggest that children who have been in care for 2 or more years require a decision to be made regarding their long-term care arrangements (AIHW 2016). Long-term care arrangements provide legal, placement and relationship stability.

Indicator 1.7a: The proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June by legal and living arrangement

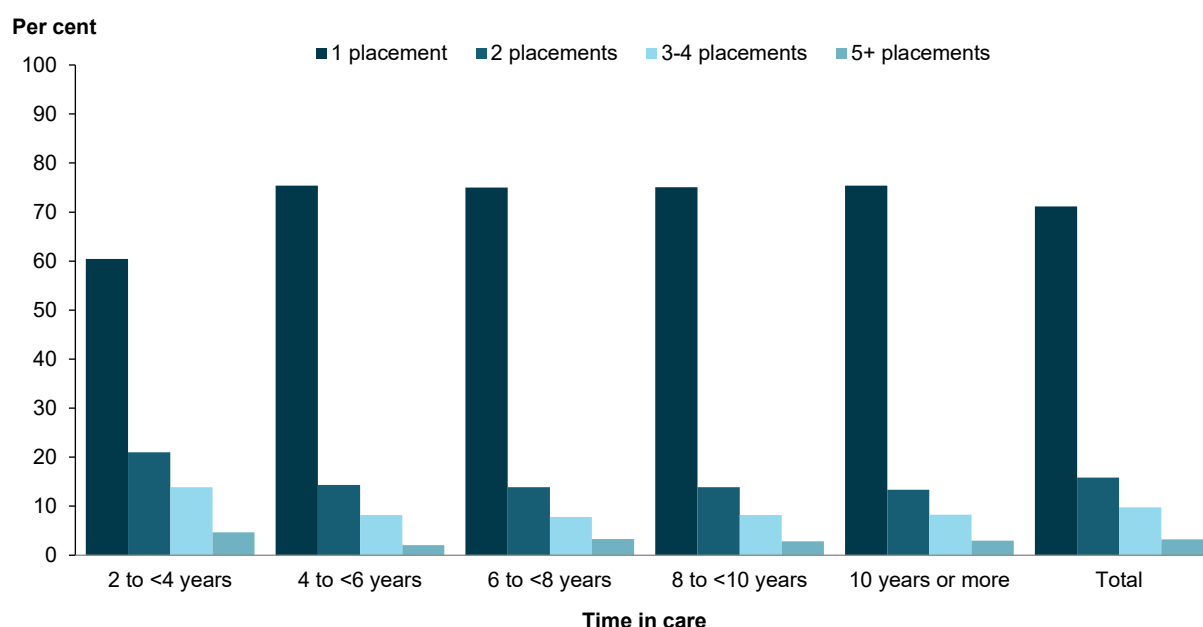
- Of the 30,600 children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2020, 25,200 (approximately 82%) were on long-term guardianship orders (Supplementary table S5.16).

- At the national level, 84% of Indigenous children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years were on long-term guardianship orders, compared with 81% of non-Indigenous children (Supplementary table S5.16).

Indicator 1.7b: The proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June by continuous time in out-of-home care and the number of placements in the last 2 years (placement stability)

- The majority (71%) of children who had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2020 had only 1 placement (supplementary tables S6.11 and S6.12).
- Regardless of the time spent in out-of-home care, the majority of children had only 1 placement (supplementary table S6.11 and Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.5: Proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June 2020, by time in care and number of placements in the last 2 years (per cent) (Indicator 1.7b)



Source: Supplementary data table (online) S6.11, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Indicator 1.7c: The proportion of children in out-of-home care for 2 or more years at 30 June by time spent in the main care arrangement (care arrangement of the longest duration) (relationship stability)

- Of the children in out-of-home care placements for 2 or more years at 30 June 2020, 90% (nearly 27,400) were in the main care arrangement for 2 years or more (Supplementary table S6.13).

Timely and informed decision-making on permanency

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. This is to recognise the fact 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.

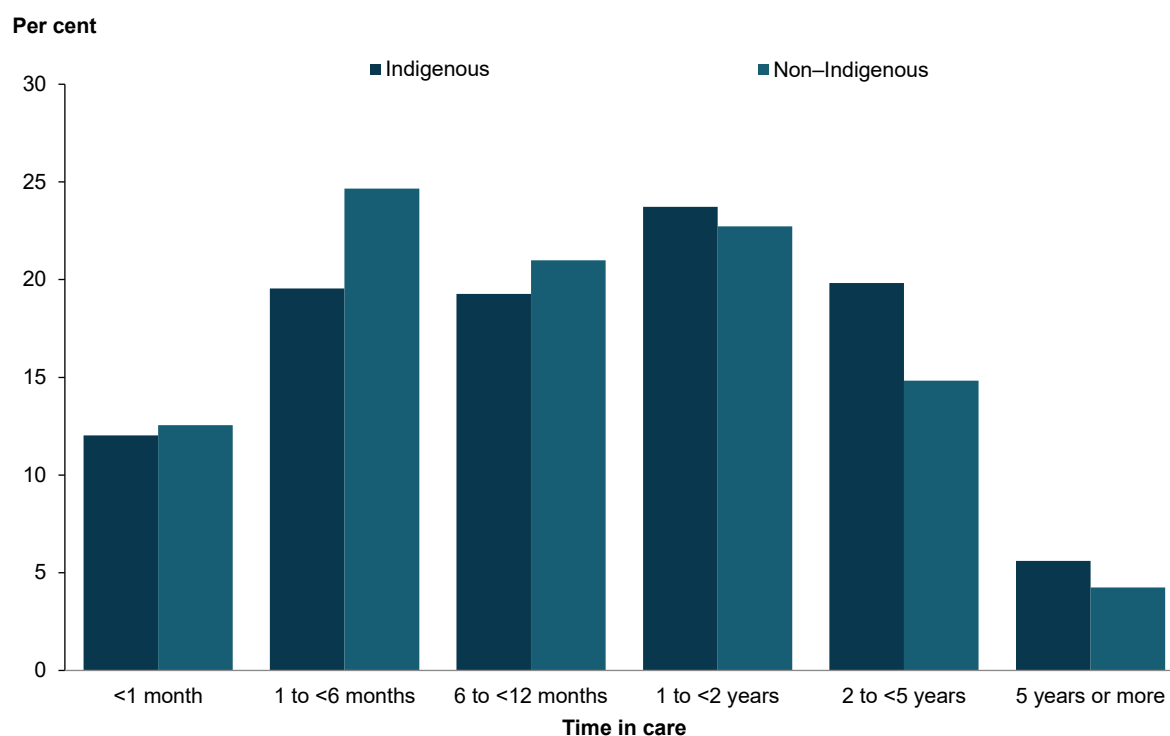
Indicator 2.1: Time from admission to out-of-home care to achieving a finalised care and protection order

- In 2019–20, over 7,500 children aged 0–17 received a finalised care and protection order. Of these children, 5,700 (76%) received a finalised care and protection order within 12 months of being admitted to out-of-home care (Supplementary table S6.14).
- The proportion of Indigenous children who achieved a finalised care and protection order within 12 months was 76% and was the same for non-Indigenous children (Supplementary table S6.14).

Indicator 2.2: Time from admission to out-of-home care to achieving a permanency outcome

- In 2019–20, 9,900 children in out-of-home care achieved a permanency outcome. Of these children, 5,600 (56%) achieved a permanency outcome within 12 months of being admitted to out-of-home care (supplementary tables S6.15 and S6.16 and Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6: Proportion of children achieving a permanency outcome, by time from admission to out-of-home care and Indigenous status, 2019–20 (per cent) (Indicator 2.2)



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

Source: Supplementary data table (online) S6.15, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

7 Carers

Key findings

- For jurisdictions with available data, there was a net decrease of 156 foster carer households and a net increase of about 1,100 relative/kinship carer households in 2019–20.
- There were about 9,200 foster carer households with placements at 30 June 2020. Of these, over half (51%) had multiple children placed with them.
- There were about 15,400 relative/kinship carer households with placements at 30 June 2020. The majority (62%) of these households had only 1 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 2019–20, the vast majority (92%) of children in out-of-home care were placed in home-based care, primarily with foster carers or with relative/kinship carers (see Chapter 5). 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

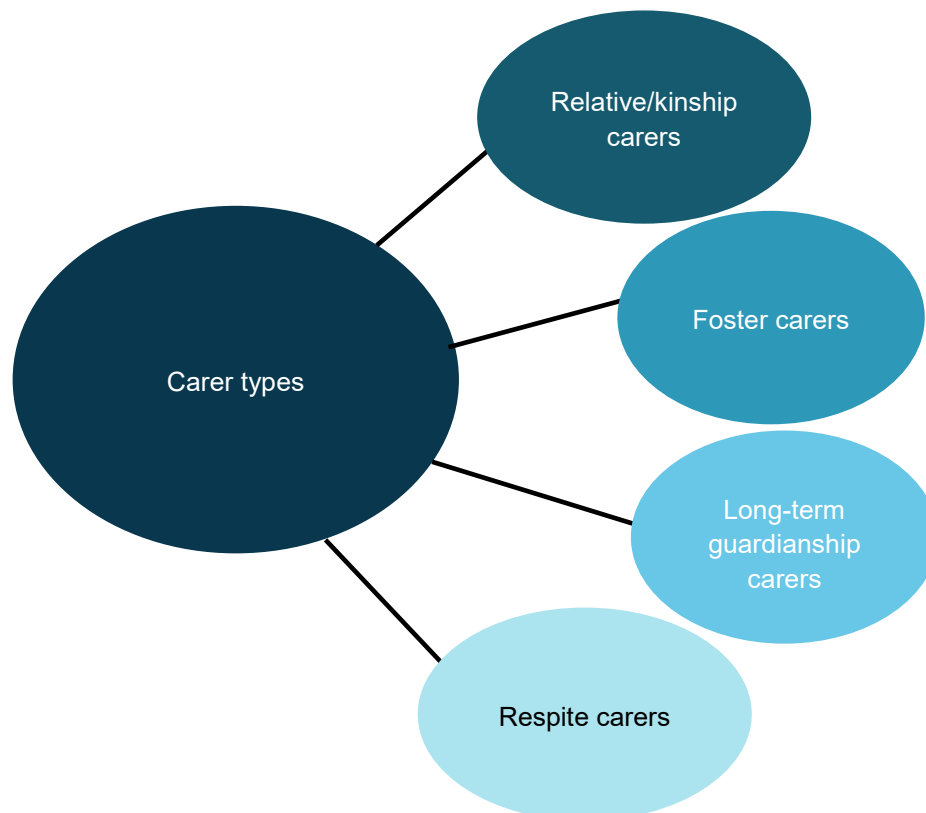


Table 7.1: Types of carers

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 limitations 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.

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 2020

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 1 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 24,578 unique carer households with a placement at 30 June 2020. Of these, 57% had 1 child placed with them, 41% had 2–4 children placed and 2% had 5 or more children placed with them (Supplementary table S7.1).

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

Number of children placed in foster carer households

Of the approximately 9,200 foster carer households with 1 or more children placed at 30 June 2020:

- more than half (51%) had multiple children placed with them
- nearly half (48%) had 2–4 children placed with them
- 3% had 5 or more children placed with them (Supplementary table S7.2; Figure 7.2).

These findings are similar to those for 2018–19 (AIHW 2020).

The prevalence of households with multiple child placements might reflect that, in many jurisdictions, priority is given to placing siblings together.

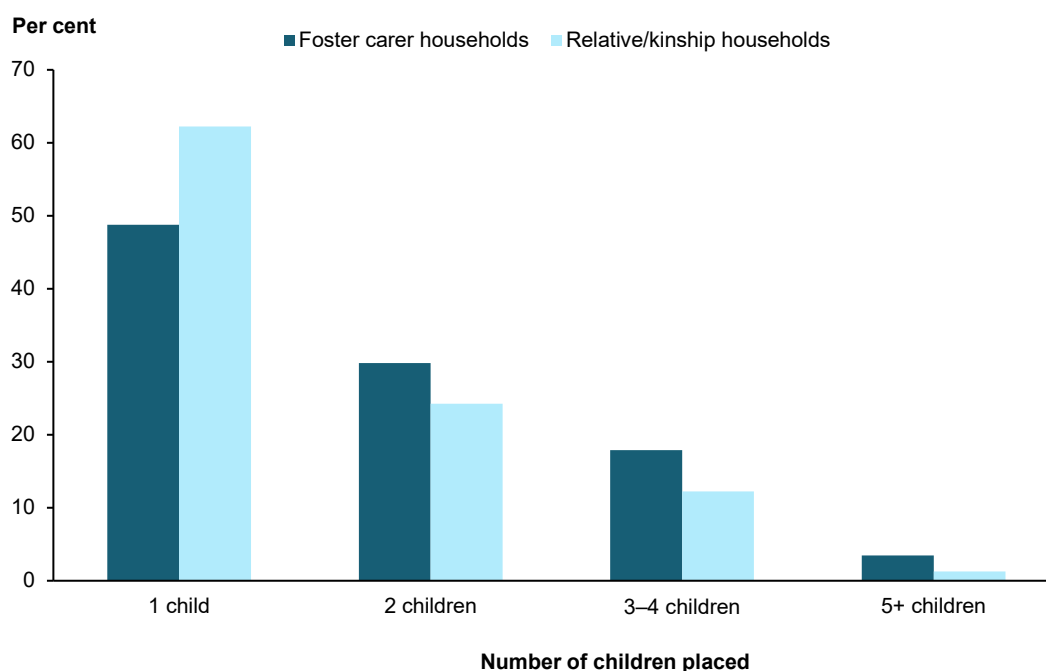
Number of children placed in relative/kinship carer households

Of the approximately 15,400 relative/kinship carer households with 1 or more children placed at 30 June 2020:

- most (62%) had 1 child placed with them, compared with less than half (49%) of foster carer households
- 36% had 2–4 children placed with them
- 1% had 5 or more children placed with them (Supplementary table S7.3).

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 2020 (per cent)



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

Sources: Supplementary data tables (online) S7.2 and S7.3, AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

How many households commenced and exited care?

Among jurisdictions with data for both households commencing and exiting care (excluding New South Wales), about 1,400 households commenced foster care and about 1,600 exited foster care in 2019–20 (Table 7.2). There was a net decrease of 156 foster carer households.

In contrast, relative/kinship carer households saw a net increase of about 1,100 households, with 5,600 commencements and 4,500 exits in 2019–20 (Table 7.2).

This pattern is consistent with carer household commencements and exits in 2018–19 (AIHW 2020) and reflects the difficulties in recruiting and retaining carers (COAG 2009) 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, 2019–20 (number)

Households	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld ^(b)	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Households commencing foster care	696	354	383	227	286	47	13	92	2,098
Households exiting foster care	n.a.	596	430	243	129	58	16	86	1,558
Households commencing relative/kinship care	1,390	3,223	701	791	583	110	39	118	6,955
Households exiting relative/kinship care	n.a.	2,972	537	617	137	84	34	119	4,500

(a) New South Wales implemented a new client management system in 2017–18 and some data are still unavailable for reporting. Data unavailable include households exiting care.

(b) Queensland data in this table do not include 538 provisionally approved carer households that have started providing foster or relative/kinship care, but are yet to receive approval as a foster or relative/kinship carer.

Note: Excludes respite placements.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

8 Intensive family support services

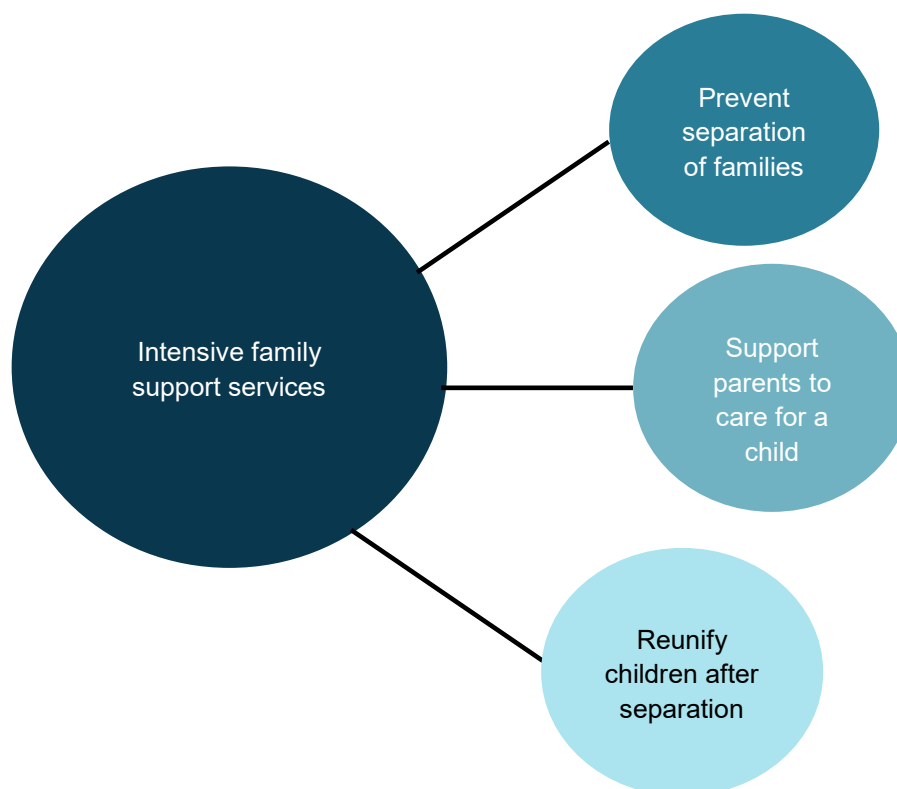
Key findings

- 461 intensive family support service providers delivered services in 2019–20 (excluding Northern Territory).
- Services were delivered across 425 locations (excluding Northern Territory).
- For jurisdictions with available data, the majority (72%) 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



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 1 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.

What were the characteristics of children commencing intensive family support services?

In 2019–20, about 40,200 children aged 0–17 commenced intensive family support services (Table 8.1). Of these, 36% were aged under 5.

The majority (72%) of children who commenced an intensive family support service were living with their parents (Supplementary table S8.1).

Children commencing intensive family support services might also appear in the 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, 2019–20 (number and per cent)

Age group	NSW ^(a)	Vic	Qld ^(b)	WA	SA	Tas ^(c)	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
0–4	5,109	4,472	3,602	394	364	288	116	242	14,587
5–9	3,250	3,664	3,558	328	229	296	124	208	11,657
10–14	1,830	3,505	3,341	266	148	233	110	159	9,592
15–17	376	1,349	1,142	62	35	57	43	27	3,091
Unknown	295	0	0	7	0	930	0	0	1,232
Total	10,860	12,990	11,643	1,057	776	1,804	393	636	40,159
Per cent									
0–4	47.0	34.4	30.9	37.3	46.9	16.0	29.5	38.1	36.3
5–9	29.9	28.2	30.6	31.0	29.5	16.4	31.6	32.7	29.0
10–14	16.9	27.0	28.7	25.2	19.1	12.9	28.0	25.0	23.9
15–17	3.5	10.4	9.8	5.9	4.5	3.2	10.9	4.2	7.7
Unknown	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	51.6	0.0	0.0	3.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) New South Wales data are estimates.

(b) Queensland data for 2019–20 are not comparable to previous years, due to significant improvements in the quality and completeness of child data provided by non-government service providers. Queensland data for 2019–20 should be regarded as an estimate, with ongoing data quality improvement work occurring.

(c) Services in Tasmania are provided under the title of Integrated Family Support Services and inclusion of some family support services as intensive rather than general may not be consistent with national definitions. Also Tasmanian data are compiled from aggregate data provided by Community Sector Organisations and as data are not validated figures should be interpreted with caution. Further, from 2018–19 data includes children referred to the Intensive Family Engagement Service.

Note: Percentages in the table might not add to 100, due to rounding.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

Appendix A: State/territory trend data

Table A1: Children in the child protection system, by state or territory, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (number and rate)

Year	NSW ^{(a)(b)}	Vic	Qld	WA	SA ^(c)	Tas ^{(d)(e)}	ACT	NT	Total
Number									
Children receiving child protection services^(f)									
2016–17	66,689	40,415	28,634	15,282	6,194	2,605	2,000	6,525	168,344
2017–18	52,146	43,333	29,573	14,947	6,538	2,439	2,243	7,385	158,604
2018–19	56,398	47,271	31,596	17,481	6,996	2,565	2,323	5,521	170,151
2019–20	58,567	45,686	34,036	18,016	8,157	2,234	2,245	5,778	174,719
Children who were the subject of substantiations									
2015–16	17,282	14,154	5,621	4,198	1,641	795	449	1,574	45,714
2016–17	18,919	15,488	5,767	4,633	1,526	755	317	1,910	49,315
2017–18	n.a.	17,245	5,884	4,530	1,649	702	277	1,744	32,031
2018–19	14,131	18,883	6,047	4,717	1,745	578	248	1,167	47,516
2019–20	16,856	16,714	6,537	4,726	2,217	406	280	1,150	48,886
Children on care and protection orders^(g)									
30 June 2016	19,876	10,962	9,580	4,946	3,448	1,248	823	1,089	51,972
30 June 2017	20,453	12,354	9,715	5,138	3,686	1,316	889	1,114	54,665
30 June 2018	20,331	13,303	9,954	5,542	3,872	1,380	904	1,125	56,411
30 June 2019	20,740	14,316	10,512	5,875	4,178	1,452	890	1,110	59,073
30 June 2020	20,359	14,947	11,570	6,059	4,537	1,463	909	1,059	60,903
Children in out-of-home care^(h)									
30 June 2017	17,879	7,500	7,352	4,226	3,353	978	704	1,059	43,051
30 June 2018	17,387	7,886	7,555	4,440	3,532	1,054	732	1,067	43,653
30 June 2019	16,884	8,490	8,125	4,754	3,797	1,103	696	1,056	44,905
30 June 2020	16,160	9,095	8,923	4,839	4,136	1,112	699	1,032	45,996

(continued)

Table A1 (continued): Children in the child protection system, by state or territory, 2015–16 to 2019–20 (number and rate)

Year	NSW ^{(a)(b)}	Vic	Qld	WA	SA ^(c)	Tas ^{(d)(e)}	ACT	NT	Total
Number per 1,000									
Children receiving child protection services^(f)									
2016–17	38.4	29.5	25.0	25.9	16.9	23.2	22.1	103.9	30.7
2017–18	29.7	31.1	25.5	25.1	17.8	21.7	24.2	117.8	28.7
2018–19	31.9	33.5	27.0	29.1	19.0	22.8	24.7	88.8	30.5
2019–20	32.9	31.9	28.8	29.7	22.1	19.8	23.5	94.1	31.0
Children who were the subject of substantiations									
2015–16	10.1	10.6	5.0	7.2	4.5	7.1	5.1	25.2	8.5
2016–17	10.9	11.3	5.0	7.8	4.2	6.7	3.5	30.4	9.0
2017–18	..	12.4	5.1	7.6	4.5	6.3	3.0	27.8	8.5
2018–19	8.0	13.4	5.2	7.9	4.7	5.1	2.6	18.8	8.5
2019–20	9.5	11.7	5.5	7.8	6.0	3.6	2.9	18.7	8.7
Children on care and protection orders^(g)									
30 June 2016	11.5	8.1	8.4	8.4	9.4	11.1	9.2	17.4	9.6
30 June 2017	11.7	9.0	8.4	8.7	10.1	11.7	9.7	17.7	9.9
30 June 2018	11.6	9.5	8.5	9.3	10.6	12.3	9.7	18.0	10.1
30 June 2019	11.7	10.1	8.9	9.7	11.3	12.9	9.4	17.9	10.5
30 June 2020	11.4	10.4	9.7	9.9	12.3	13.0	9.4	17.2	10.8
Children in out-of-home care^(h)									
30 June 2017	10.2	5.4	6.4	7.1	9.2	8.7	7.7	16.8	7.8
30 June 2018	9.9	5.6	6.5	7.4	9.6	9.4	7.8	17.0	7.9
30 June 2019	9.5	6.0	6.9	7.9	10.3	9.8	7.3	17.0	8.0
30 June 2020	9.1	6.3	7.5	7.9	11.2	9.9	7.2	16.8	8.1

(a) New South Wales care and protection orders data do not include children on finalised supervisory orders.

(b) New South Wales provided limited substantiations data in 2017–18 due to the implementation of a new client management system. Therefore, substantiations rates for 2017–18 have been calculated excluding New South Wales and should not be compared with rates in other reporting periods.

(c) South Australia could provide the number of children in out-of-home care only where the department is making a financial contribution to the care of a child (this excludes cases where financial payment was offered and declined).

(d) Data for orders in Tasmania may not be comparable year to year due to issues with the recording of order status.

(e) Tasmanian data exclude children not under care and protection orders placed with relatives for whom a financial contribution is made under the Supported Extended Family or Relatives Allowance programs. Tasmania is not able to include children in care where a financial payment was offered but was declined by the carer meaning Tasmania's data are slightly lower than would be the case if the counting rule was strictly applied.

(f) Children receiving child protection services and children in substantiations were measured in financial years (2015–16 to 2019–20). These data include unborn children and children of unknown age.

(g) Children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care were measured as at 30 June each year. These data include children of unknown age.

(h) 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.

Notes

1. Data for 'Children receiving child protection services' and 'Children who were the subject of substantiations' are not comparable across jurisdictions due to differences in the way jurisdictions collect and report data for notifications, investigations and substantiations. See Appendix C (online) for more information.
2. Some data may not match those published in previous *Child protection Australia* publications due to retrospective updates to data.
3. See Appendix B (online) for the method used to calculate rates.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2019–20.

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- Department of Communities, Western Australia
- Department for Child Protection, South Australia
- Department of Communities, Tasmania
- Community Services Directorate, Australian Capital Territory
- Territory Families, Housing and Communities, Northern Territory.

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

Symbols

0	zero
..	not applicable
<	less than
>	greater than
n.a.	not available

Glossary

Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia: A classification of the level of accessibility to goods and services (such as general practitioners, hospitals, and specialist care) based on the proximity to these services (measured by road distance).

administrative arrangement: An agreement with a child protection department, which has the same effect as a court order of transferring custody or guardianship. This arrangement can also allow a child to be placed in out-of-home care without going through the courts.

adoption: A legal process involving the transfer of the rights and responsibilities for the permanent care of a child from the child's parent(s) to their adoptive parent(s). The legal relationship between the child and the parent(s) is severed, and any legal rights that existed from birth regarding the birth parent(s)—such as inheritance—are removed. For the adoptive parents, the legal rights of the adopted child become the same as they would be if the child had been born to the adoptive parent(s).

age: The age of a person in completed years, 'unborn' for those in utero, or 'less than 1' where age is between live birth and under 1 year.

The tables containing information for notifications, investigations, and substantiations show age at the time of notification.

The tables containing information on children on orders by type of living arrangements, and children in out-of-home care at 30 June, show age at 30 June 2020.

Tables containing information on admissions or discharges show age at the time of first admission or discharge.

For intensive family support services, age is shown as at the commencement of the service.

agency: A body funded by state and territory departments responsible for child protection to provide services.

aunt/uncle: A carer who is the biological/step/adoptive aunt or uncle of the child placed in their care. This includes Indigenous kinship placements with aunts/uncles. Relatives beyond first aunt/uncle are excluded.

Australian Statistical Geography Standard: Common framework defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for collection and dissemination of geographically classified statistics. The Australian Statistical Geography Standard replaced the Australian Standard Geographical Classification in July 2011.

care and protection order: A legal order or arrangement that gives child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare. See also **finalised guardianship or custody order**, **finalised third-party parental responsibility order**, **finalised supervisory order**, **interim and temporary order**, and **administrative arrangement**.

child: A young person aged 0–17. For some states and territories, this includes unborn children.

child care personnel: People engaged in providing occasional, part-time or full-time day care for children.

child concern report: Report to a community services department about concerns for a child, where there is no indication that a child might have been, or is at risk of being, harmed through abuse or neglect. This might include concerns about a child's welfare related to the quality of their home environment, or the standard of care that they are receiving.

child protection and support services: The departments in each state and territory that are responsible for child protection matters.

children receiving child protection services: Children who are the subjects of an investigation of a notification, on a care and protection order, and/or in Out-of-home care.

children subject to orders: Children aged 0–17 on a care and protection order or other formal arrangement, or children aged 18 or under who were discharged from those care and protection orders/arrangements. See also **care and Protection order**.

custody order: See **finalised guardianship Or custody order**.

dealt with by other means: A notification responded to by means other than an investigation, such as by providing advice or referring to services. Notifications dealt with by other means are divided into 2 categories: **notification in process** and **notification resolved without investigation**.

departmental officer: Any person employed by a state or territory department responsible for child protection who is not classified under any other ‘source of notification’ category.

disability: An umbrella term for any or all of: an impairment of body structure or function, a limitation in activities, or a restriction in participation. Disability is a multidimensional concept, and is considered as an interaction between health conditions and the environment.

emotional abuse: Any act by a person having the care of a child that results in the child suffering any kind of significant emotional deprivation or trauma. Children affected by exposure to family violence are also included In this category.

family: Includes **parent/guardian**, **sibling**, and **other relatives/kin**.

family care: A type of care where the child is living with parents (natural or adoptive) or other relatives/kin (other than parents) who are not reimbursed. See also **relatives/kin who are not reimbursed**.

family group home: A home for children provided by a department or community-sector agency that has live-in, non-salaried carers who are reimbursed and/or subsidised for providing care.

finalised guardianship or custody order: Order involving the transfer of legal guardianship to the relevant state or territory department or non-government agency. This order involves considerable intervention in the child’s life and that of their family, and is sought only as a last resort.

A guardianship order conveys responsibility for the welfare of the child to the guardian (for example, for the child’s education, health, religion, accommodation, and financial matters). It does not necessarily grant the right to the daily care and control of the child, or the right to make decisions about the daily care and control of the child, which are granted under custody orders.

A custody order is generally an order that places a child in the custody of either the state or territory department responsible for child protection, or a non-government agency. It usually involves the child protection department being responsible for the daily care and requirements of the child, while the parent retains legal guardianship. Custody alone does not bestow any responsibility for the long-term welfare of the child.

Finalised guardianship or custody orders can be a **long-term order** or a **short-term order**.

finalised investigation: A notification received between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020 that was investigated, the investigation completed and an outcome recorded by 31 August 2020. The cut-off point of 31 August is applied to allow time for investigating notifications made

close to the end of the previous financial year. The 'outcomes of finalised investigations' are classified into 2 categories: **substantiated** and **not substantiated**.

finalised supervisory order: An order giving the department responsible for child protection some responsibility for a child's welfare. Under this order, the department supervises and/or directs the level and type of care that is to be provided to the child.

A child under a supervisory order is generally under the responsibility of his or her parents, and the guardianship or custody of the child is unaffected. This means finalised supervisory orders are less interventionist than finalised guardianship or custody orders, but require the child's parent or guardian to meet specified conditions, such as medical care of the child.

finalised third-party parental responsibility order: An order transferring all duties, powers, responsibilities, and authority to which parents are entitled by law to a nominated person(s) whom the court considers appropriate. The nominated person may be an individual, such as a relative, or an officer of the state or territory department responsible for child protection. Third-party parental responsibility may be ordered in the event that a parent is unable to care for a child, with parental responsibility then transferred to a relative, or other nominated person.

Finalised third-party parental responsibility orders can be a **long-term order** or a **Short-term order**.

formal shared care: Where a case plan exists for children to live in family care, and to have regular planned periods in Out-of-home care.

foster care: A form of out-of-home care where the caregiver is authorised and reimbursed (or was offered but declined reimbursement) by the state/territory for the care of the child. (This category excludes relatives/kin who are reimbursed.) Degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers vary.

foster carer household: A private household containing 1 or more foster carers:

- who have undergone the relevant screening/selection and approval process
- who have received authorisation from the relevant department or agency to enable a child to be placed in their care
- for whom reimbursement is available from the state or territory government for expenses incurred in caring for the child (degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers vary)
- who are part of an ongoing review process.

friend/neighbour: An unrelated person or acquaintance who is known to, or lives in close proximity to, the child or their family, or to the person believed to be responsible for the Abuse or neglect.

grandparent: A carer who is the biological/step/adoptive grandparent of the child placed in their care. This includes Indigenous kinship placements with grandparents.

guardianship order: See **finalised guardianship Or custody order**.

home-based out-of-home care: Care provided for a child who is placed in the home of a carer, who is reimbursed (or who has been offered but declined reimbursement) for the cost of care of that child. Home-based out-of-home care includes: **relatives/kin who are reimbursed, foster care, and other home-based Out-of-home care**.

hospital/health centre personnel: Any person not elsewhere classified who is employed at a public or private hospital or other health Centre or clinic.

households commencing care: Includes all carer households that, during the year ended 30 June, received authorisation from the relevant department or agency to enable a child to be placed in their care, regardless of whether a child was placed in their care in that period.

This includes households that received provisional authorisation (which might be to facilitate a placement) while formal approval/registration was being finalised. These households are included only once, at the time of provisional authorisation (and not again when full authorisation is received). Households commencing care for the first time are included. Households whose existing authorisation has been renewed as part of a standard ongoing review process are excluded. Households receiving authorisation to provide respite care only (and not also authorisation to provide general foster or relative/kinship care) are excluded.

households exiting care: Includes any carer household that, at some point during the year ended 30 June, were no longer authorised by the relevant department or agency to have a child placed in their care. For example, the carer household might have voluntarily withdrawn/deregistered, or the relevant department or agency might have formally revoked their authorisation. Households changing from provisional authorisation to full authorisation are excluded.

immigration (Guardianship of Children) orders: Orders made under the *Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946*. Under this Act, the Minister for Immigration is the legal guardian for unaccompanied humanitarian minors (children under 18 who have entered Australia without a relative to care for them). But the minister may assign custody of the child to a willing and suitable person in the jurisdiction where a child lives. The assigned person becomes responsible for all matters concerning the child's daily activities, care, and welfare. This category captures the arrangements of children who are subsequently placed with carers funded by the departments responsible for Child protection.

independent living: Accommodation where the child lives independently, such as private board or being the lead tenant in a household.

Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD): One of the indexes in the set of **Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas** used to rank the average socioeconomic conditions of the population in an area. It is a ranking of the relative advantage or disadvantage of an area that uses a combination of Census advantage and disadvantage variables, including income, education, employment, occupation, and housing.

Indigenous: Children of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island descent who identify, and are identified as, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Indigenous status: The status of a person who identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and is accepted as such by the community in which they live. See also **Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and unknown Indigenous status**.

infant: Child under 1 year of age.

intensive family support services: Services that aim to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers because of child protection concerns, and to reunify families where separation has already occurred.

interim and temporary order: An order covering the provision of a limited period of supervision and/or placement of a child. Parental responsibility under this order may be with the parents or with the department responsible for child protection. 'Unfinalised orders' (such as applications to the court for care and protection orders) are also included in this category, unless another finalised order is in place. In some jurisdictions, interim and temporary orders are put into place while a finalised order is sought.

investigation: The process whereby the relevant department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification received between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020. Departmental staff assess the harm, or degree of harm, to the child, and their protective needs. An investigation includes sighting or interviewing the child where it is practical to do so. See also **investigation in process**, **investigation closed—no outcome possible**, and **finalised investigation**.

investigation closed—no outcome possible: An investigation begun for a notification made between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020 that was not able to be finalised to reach the outcome of 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated', and for which files were closed for administrative purposes. This might happen, for example, in cases where the family has relocated. For this report, these investigations were completed between 1 July 2019 And 30 June 2020.

investigation in process: An investigation that began for a notification received between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020, but was not completed nor an outcome recorded by 31 August 2019.

known carer adoption: Adoption by the foster parent(s) or other non-relative(s) who has been caring for a child in out-of-home care, and has had the responsibility for making decisions about the daily care and control of the child for the relevant period (as specified by the relevant state/territory department) before the adoption.

living arrangement: The type of care in which a child on an order was living. See also **residential care**, **foster care**, **family group home**, **home-based out-of-home care**, and **family care**.

living situation: The type of care in which the child or children in the family lived at the time of case commencement for intensive family support services. See also **family care**, **out-of-home care**, **formal shared care**, and **other living arrangement**.

location: The site at which the intensive family support service workers are based. If an agency has more than 1 location, each location must be counted.

long-term care: Children who had been continuously in out-of-home care for 2 years or more.

long-term guardianship carers: A carer who has a child placed with them under an order where parental responsibility is transferred to them. See also **finalised third-party parental responsibility order**.

long-term order: Transfers guardianship/custody to the nominated person for a specified period greater than 2 years, generally until the child reaches the age of 18.

medical/health personnel: Includes **medical practitioner**, **hospital/health centre personnel**, and **other Health personnel**.

medical practitioner: Registered medical practitioner, including both general practitioners and specialists in hospitals or In the community.

neglect: Any serious act or omission by a person having the care of a child that, within the bounds of cultural tradition, constitutes a failure to provide conditions that are essential for the healthy physical and emotional development of a child.

new clients: These are children or young people who have never previously been the subject of an investigation, any type of care and protection order (as per the scope of this collection), or funded out-of-home care placement (excluding respite placements lasting less than 7 days) within The jurisdiction.

non-familial relationship: A carer who has a pre-existing relationship with the child in their care, but is not a biological/step/adoptive relative (for example, neighbours, family friends and so forth). This includes Indigenous kinship placements with carers who have a non-familial relationship to the child.

non-government organisation: Any non-government organisation that provides services to the community on a not-for-profit basis, and is not classified under any other **source of notification** category.

non-Indigenous: Children who have not been identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent; this excludes children of unknown Indigenous status.

not stated: Information that was unknown or not recorded.

not substantiated: A notification received between 1 July 2019 and 30 June 2020 where an investigation concluded that there was no reasonable cause to suspect prior, current, or future abuse, neglect, or harm to the child.

notification: Contact made to an authorised department by people or other bodies alleging child abuse or neglect, child maltreatment, or harm to a child.

notification in process: A notification where the decision to investigate has Not been reached.

notification resolved without investigation: A notification responded to by means other than an investigation, such as by providing advice or referring to services.

other health personnel: A person who provides supplementary, paramedical, and/or ancillary medical services. This includes nurses, infant welfare sisters, dentists, radiographers, physiotherapists, pharmacists, and so on. It does not include social workers and non-medical hospital/health Centre personnel.

other home-based out-of-home care: A care type where the child was in home-based out-of-home care, other than with relatives/kin who are reimbursed, or in foster care.

other Indigenous kinship relationship: Carers who are members of Indigenous communities, who are accepted by that community as being related to the child. Excludes Indigenous kinship placements with grandparents, aunts/uncles, siblings, other relatives, and carers with a non-familial relationship to the child.

other living arrangement: Living arrangement not otherwise classified, including unknown living arrangement. For children on orders, this includes any placements made in disability services, psychiatric services, juvenile justice facilities, specialist homelessness services, and overnight child care services, boarding schools, hospitals, hotels/motels, and the defence forces. These living arrangements may have rostered and/or paid staff, and are generally not a home-Like environment.

other out-of-home care: Out-of-home care placements that are not otherwise categorised, including unknown placement types. This includes boarding schools, hospitals, hotels/motels, and the defence forces.

other relatives/kin: Relative(s) of the child (other than parents), including grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins. The relationship can be full, half, or step, or through adoption, and can be traced through, or to, a person whose parents were not married to each other at the time of their birth. This category also includes members of Indigenous communities who are accepted by that community as being related to the child.

other source of notification: All other persons or organisations not classified by any other source of notification category (for example, ministers of religion or government agencies and instrumentalities not elsewhere classified), as well as people who make notifications anonymously.

out-of-home care: Overnight care for children aged under 18 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). See also **residential care, family group home, foster care, relative/kinship care, independent living, and other Out-of-home care.**

parent/guardian: A natural or substitute parent, spouse of a natural parent, adoptive parent, or spouse of an adoptive parent, or any other person who has an ongoing legal responsibility for the care and protection of a child.

permanency planning: The processes used by state and territory departments responsible for child protection to achieve a stable long-term care arrangement (which can be broadly grouped as reunification, third-party parental responsibility orders, long-term finalised guardianship/custody/care, and adoption).

permanent care order: See **finalised third-party parental responsibility order.**

physical abuse: Any non-accidental physical act inflicted upon a child by a person having the care of a child.

police: Any member of a Commonwealth, state or territory law enforcement agency.

prevention services: Services specifically aimed at assisting families to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers for child protection reasons.

provisionally approved carer household: Households that have received provisional authorisation (which might be to facilitate a placement of a child), while formal approval/registration is being finalised. This category is used only for jurisdictions where the type of the provisional authorisation is not recorded until the approval/registration process is finalised.

relative/kinship care: A form of out-of-home care where the caregiver is:

- a relative (other than parents)
- considered to be family or a close friend
- a member of the child or young person's community (in accordance with their culture)
- reimbursed by the state/territory for the care of the child (or who has been offered but declined reimbursement).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, a kinship carer may be another Indigenous person who is a member of their community, a compatible community, or from the same language group.

relative/kinship carer household: A private household containing 1 or more relative/kinship carers:

- who have undergone the relevant screening/selection and approval process
- who have received authorisation from the relevant department or agency to enable a relative/kinship child to be placed in their care
- for whom reimbursement is available from a government authority or non-government organisation for expenses incurred in caring for the child (degrees of reimbursement made to relative/kinship carers vary)
- who are part of an ongoing review process.

relatives/kin who are not reimbursed: Relatives/kin (other than parents) who are not reimbursed by the state/territory for the care of the child.

relatives/kin who are reimbursed: Where the caregiver is:

- a relative (other than parents)
- considered to be family or a close friend
- a member of the child or young person's community (in accordance with their culture)
- reimbursed by the state/territory for the care of the child (or who has been offered but declined reimbursement).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, a kinship carer may be another Indigenous person who is a member of their community, a compatible community, or from the same language group.

remoteness classification: Each state and territory is divided into several regions, based on their relative accessibility to goods and services (such as general practitioners, hospitals, and specialist care) as measured by road distance. These regions are based on the **Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia** and defined as remoteness areas by either the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (before 2011) or the **Australian Statistical Geographical Standard** (from 2011 onwards) in Each Census year.

repeat clients: These are children or young people who have previously been the subject of an investigation, who were discharged (according to national specifications) from any type of 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.

residential care: A type of care where the placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placements for children, and where there are paid staff.

respite care: A form of out-of-home care used to provide short-term accommodation for children and young people where the intention is for the child to return to their prior place of residence. Respite placements include:

- respite from birth family, where a child is placed in out-of-home care temporarily for reasons other than child protection (for example, the child's parents are ill or unable to care for them temporarily, as a family support mechanism to prevent entry into full-time care, as part of the reunification process, or as a shared care arrangement)
- respite from placement, where a child spends regular, short and agreed periods of time with a carer other than their primary carer.

reunification: A planned process of safely returning and enabling a child to remain at home with their birth parent(s), family, or former guardian after a period of time in care when it is in the child's best interests to do so, and where it will safeguard the child's long-term stability and permanency. In practice, reunification tends to be nearly exclusively with birth parents. Also known as restoration.

reunification services: Services that seek to reunify families where separation of children from their primary caregivers has already occurred for child protection reasons.

school personnel: Any appropriately trained person involved in instructing, or imparting knowledge to, children or in providing direct support for this education. This includes teachers, teachers' aides, school principals, and counsellors who work in preschool, kindergarten, primary, secondary, technical, sporting, or art-and-Crafts education.

sexual abuse: Any act by a person having the care of a child that exposes the child to, or involves the child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding, or contrary to accepted community standards.

short-term order: An order that transfers guardianship/custody to the nominated person for a specified period of 2 years or less.

sibling: A brother or half-brother, sister or half-sister, whether natural (that is, biological), adopted or foster. Sibling relative/kinship carers are those who are the biological/step/adoptive sibling of the child placed in their care. This includes Indigenous kinship placements with siblings.

social worker: Any person engaged in providing social or welfare service in the community.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas: A set of indexes, created from Census data, that aim to represent the areas of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage in Australian communities. The index value reflects the overall or average level of disadvantage of the population of an area; it does not show how individuals living in the same area differ from each other. This report uses the **Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage And Disadvantage**.

source of notification: The person or organisation that initially made a child protection notification to the relevant authority. The source is classified according to the relationship to the child allegedly abused, neglected, or harmed. The source of notification is reported under 12 categories: **subject child, family, friend/neighbour, medical/health personnel, social worker, school personnel, child care personnel, police, departmental officer, non-government organisation personnel, other source of notification, and not stated**.

subject child: Any person who notifies the department regarding a concern About themselves.

substantiation of notification: Child protection notification made to relevant authorities during the current year (for example, 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020) that was investigated (with the investigation finalised by 31 August), and where it was concluded that there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had been, was being, or was likely to be, abused, neglected, or otherwise harmed. Substantiation does not necessarily require sufficient evidence for a successful prosecution, and does not imply that treatment or case management was provided. Substantiations may also include cases where there is no suitable caregiver, such as children who have been abandoned, or whose parents are deceased.

third-party parental care: Placements for children on third-party parental responsibility orders. See **finalised third-party parental responsibility order**, and **long-term guardianship carers**.

third-party parental responsibility order: See **finalised third-party parental responsibility order**.

type of abuse or neglect: One of the 4 types, or categories, of substantiations: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Each category includes findings of actual harm or significant risk of harm. Where more than 1 type of abuse or neglect has occurred, the substantiation is classified to the type likely to be the most severe in the short term, or to place the child most at risk in the short term, or, if such an assessment is not possible, classified to the most obvious form of abuse or neglect. See also **physical abuse**, **sexual abuse**, **emotional abuse**, and **neglect**.

type of action for notification: Action taken by the department responsible for child protection in response to a notification. See also **investigation**, and **dealt with by other means**.

type of placement: The type of out-of-home care in which a child was living. See also **residential care**, **family group home**, **home-based out-of-home care**, **independent living**, and **other Out-of-home care**.

unknown Indigenous status: Describes children whose Indigenous status was unknown.

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Related publications

This report, *Child protection Australia 2019–20*, is part of an annual series. Supplementary population data tables (those with a prefix of S) are part of the *Child protection Australia 2019–20* release. These tables, as well as earlier editions of the report, can be downloaded free from <www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection-publications>.

The following AIHW publications about children, youth, and families might also be of interest:

- AIHW 2013. National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020: technical paper on operational definitions and data issues for key national indicators. Cat. no. CWS 44. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2013. Scoping reportable measures for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020: supporting outcome 1. Cat. no. CWS 45. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2014. A new approach to national child protection data: implementation of the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set. Child welfare series no. 59. Cat. no. CWS 50. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2014. Indigenous child safety. Cat. no. IHW 127. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2015. Educational outcomes for children in care: linking 2013 child protection and NAPLAN data. Cat. no. CWS 54. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2015. Developing a linked data collection to report on the relationships between child protection and youth justice supervision. Data linkage series no. 20. Cat. no. CWS 55. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2016. Permanency planning in child protection: a review of current concepts and available data 2016. Child welfare series no. 64. Cat. no. CWS 58. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2016. The views of children and young people in out-of-home care: overview of indicator results from a pilot national survey 2015. Bulletin no. 132. Cat. no. AUS 197. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2016. Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection: 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015. Cat. no. HOU 279. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2019. The views of children and young people in out-of-home care: overview of indicator results from second national survey, 2018. Cat. no. CWS 68. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2019. Australia's welfare 2019. Australia's welfare series no. 14. Cat. no. AUS 226. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2017. Children admitted to out-of-home care 2014–15. Bulletin no. 142. Cat. no. AUS 217. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2020. Young people under youth justice supervision and in child protection 2018–19. Cat. no. CSI 28. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2020. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicators 2018–19: measuring progress. Cat. no. CWS 77. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2021. Child protection in the time of COVID-19. Cat. no. CWS 76. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2021. Adoptions Australia 2019–20. Child welfare series no. 73. Cat. no. CWS 79. Canberra: AIHW.



During 2019-20, 174,700 (31 per 1,000) Australian children received child protection services (investigation, care and protection order and/or were in out-of-home care). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 8 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. Children from geographically remote areas were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation, or be in out-of-home care than those from major cities. Over 5,300 children were reunified with family during 2019-20.

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