

## Children in care

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### What is out-of-home care?

Out-of-home care refers to the care of children and young people up to 18 years who are unable to live with their families (often due to child abuse and neglect). It involves the placement of a child or young person with alternate caregivers on a short- or long-term basis (Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2003).

There are three main types of out-of-home care:

- *foster care*: where care is provided in the private home of a substitute family who receives payment that is intended to cover the child's living expenses;
- *kinship care*: where the caregiver is a family member or a person with a pre-existing relationship with the child; and
- *residential care*: where placement is in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placement for children and where there is paid staff. This includes facilities where there are rostered staff, where there is a live-in carer and where staff are off-site (e.g., a lead tenant or supported residence arrangement) (Australian Senate Community Affairs Committee, 2005, p. 78).

Out-of-home care can be arranged either formally or informally. Informal care refers to arrangements made without intervention by statutory authorities or courts; and formal care occurs following a child protection intervention (either by voluntary agreement or care and protection court order). This resource sheet will describe those children in out-of-home care in Australia who are on care and protection orders.

### How many children live in out-of-home care in Australia?

The most recent statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2009) report that, as of 30 June 2008, there were 31,166 Australian children living in out-of-home care. Table 1 shows the number of children in Australia admitted to out-of-home care, by age group, in each state and territory during 2007–08.

The number of children in out-of-home care has risen every year over the last 10 years (AIHW, 2009). Since 30 June 1998, the number of children in out-of-home care has increased by 115%. The numbers rose almost 10% in 2007–08. At 30 June 2008, the rate of children aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care was 6.2 children per 1,000, compared to a rate of 3.1 per 1,000 at 30 June 1998 (AIHW, 2009).

### What percentage of children in out-of-home care live in foster care in Australia?

The AIHW statistics show that 94% of all children living in out-of-home care in Australia are in home-based care. Of that figure, 48% are in foster care, 45% are in relative/kinship care and 1% are in a different kind of home-based care (AIHW, 2009).

Table 2 compares the proportion of children in out-of-home care by living arrangements for each state and territory. Of children in out-of-home care, the Northern Territory has a relatively high proportion in foster care (62.1%), and New South Wales has a relatively high proportion placed with relatives or kin (56.9%) compared to other states and territories (AIHW, 2009).

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

As of August 2006, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprised 4.2% of all children aged 0–17 years in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2007) yet in 2007–08 they constituted 29.1% of those children placed in out-of-home care. In all jurisdictions, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on placement orders was higher than that for other children. As of June 2008, there were 9,070 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia—a placement rate of 41.3 per 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 years. In contrast, the rate for non-Indigenous children was 4.6 per 1,000. This indicates that the national rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

children in out-of-home care was almost 9 times the rate for other children (AIHW, 2009). There was substantial variation across the states and territories, with the placement rate of Indigenous children varying from 11.3 per 1,000 in the Northern Territory to 66.3 per 1,000 in New South Wales (AIHW, 2009).

### What is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle?

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle has been endorsed in legislation or policy, in all Australian states and territories. The

principle states the preferred order of placement for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child who has been removed from their birth family. The preferred order is for the child to be placed with:

- the child's extended family (kin);
- the child's Indigenous community (kith); or
- other Indigenous people.

Only if an appropriate placement cannot be found from these three groups can an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child be placed with a non-Indigenous carer (Lock, 1997).

**Table 1. Children admitted to out-of-home care by age group, states and territories, 2007–08.**

Age (years)	NSW	Vic <sup>1</sup>	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
<1	730	416	554	206	114	47	28	32	2,127
1–4	1,150	762	784	224	170	82	36	79	3,287
5–9	1,133	694	728	199	157	64	37	65	3,077
10–14	1,141	816	807	185	154	81	53	85	3,322
15–17	311	339	273	41	57	27	13	15	1,076
Unknown	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,467</b>	<b>3,027</b>	<b>3,146</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>12,891</b>
<b>Per cent</b>									
<1	16.3	13.7	17.6	24.1	17.5	15.6	16.8	11.6	16.5
1–4	25.8	25.2	24.9	26.2	26.1	27.2	21.6	28.6	25.5
5–9	25.4	22.9	23.1	23.3	24.1	21.3	22.2	23.6	23.9
10–14	25.6	27.0	25.7	21.6	23.6	26.9	31.7	30.8	25.8
15–17	7.0	11.2	8.7	4.8	8.7	9.0	7.8	5.4	8.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Notes: (1) Due to new service and data reporting arrangements, the Victorian child protection data as of 2006–07 may not be fully comparable with previous years' data. The table 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 more than two months previously. Children admitted to out-of-home care more than once during the year were only counted at the first admission. Percentages exclude children of unknown age. Percentages in tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009, p. 55).

**Table 2. Proportion (%) of children in out-of-home care, by living arrangements, states and territories, as at 30 June 2008**

Type of placement	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
Foster care	40.2	48.9	60.5	46.4	49.5	56.8	48.0	62.1	47.7
Relatives/kin	56.9	36.1	33.7	44.6	36.0	27.1	39.5	18.1	45.0
Other home-based care	-	6.1	-	-	0.2	6.2	-	-	1.1
Total home based care	97.1	91.1	94.2	91.0	85.7	90.1	87.5	80.2	93.8
Family group homes	-	-	-	2.0	-	5.4	-	3.5	0.3
Residential care	2.3	8.4	5.8	5.7	9.0	3.0	11.1	1.0	4.8
Independent living	0.5	0.5	-	0.9	1.4	0.3	1.2	0.8	0.5
Other	-	-	-	0.4	3.9	1.2	0.2	14.6	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Percentages in tables may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009, p. 58).

The principle provides an important acknowledgement that previous policies caused suffering to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and reflects the right of Indigenous people to raise their children and retain them in their communities (Lock, 1997).

Children placed in one of the three preferred options are described as having been placed in accordance with the principle. The percentage of children placed in accordance with the principle varied substantially across jurisdictions from 35.3% in Tasmania to 84.5% of placements in New South Wales (see Figure 1). In Australia in 2007–08, 72% of Indigenous children were placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (AIHW, 2009).

For more information see Resource Sheet No. 10, *Child Protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children* <[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs10/rs10.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/sheets/rs10/rs10.html)>.

### How are foster carers reimbursed?

State and territory governments pay foster care subsidies to carers. The size of the subsidy varies between the states and territories. With the exception of NSW, subsidies increase with the age of the young person in care. Table 3 shows the rates of subsidies provided to

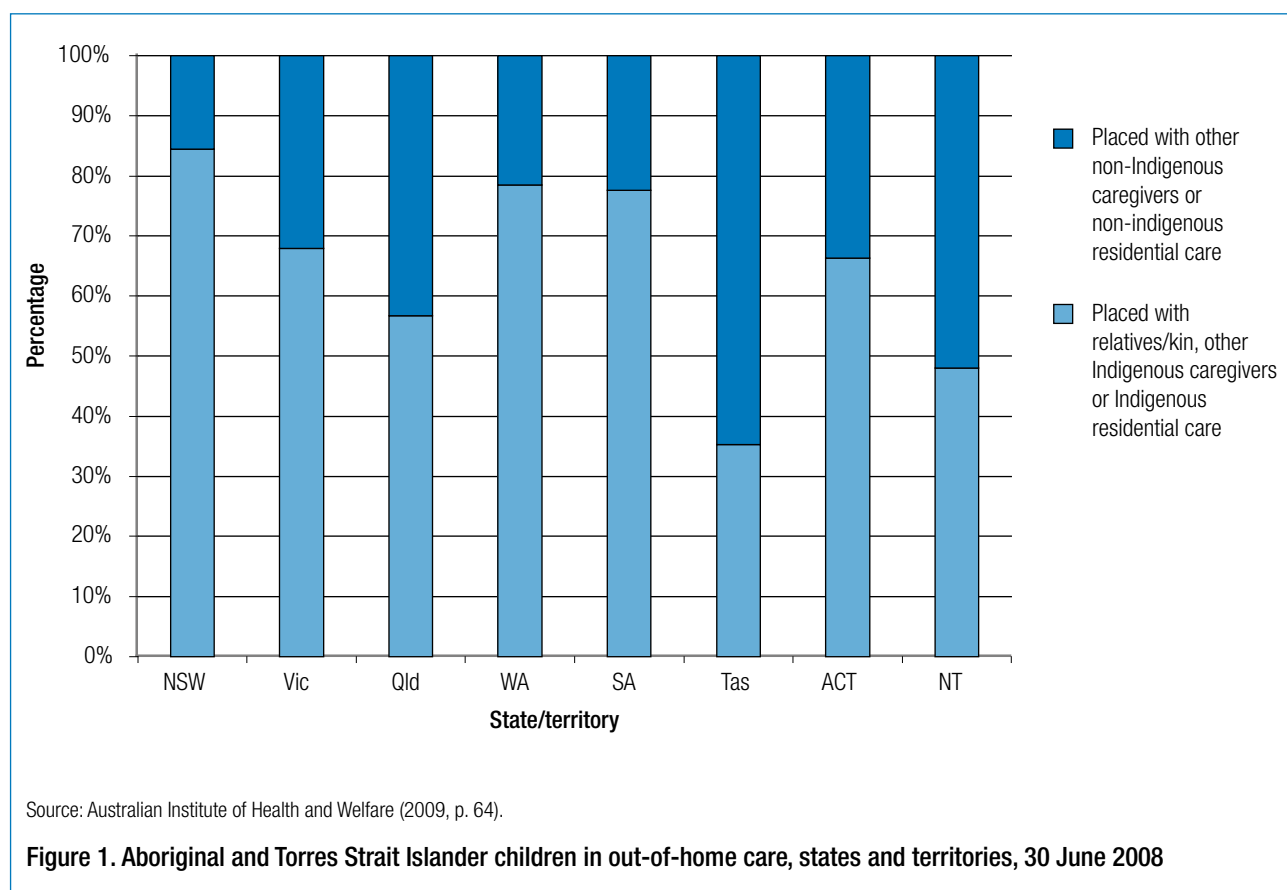
foster carers across each Australian state and territory as at 1 July 2006.

Some carers may be able to access additional payments from state governments; for example, if a child has been classified as having very high needs.

In addition, caregivers may be entitled to a range of benefits funded by the Commonwealth Government. For example, foster carers can access Family Tax Benefits and Health Care Cards for foster children in their care, regardless of means testing (Australian Foster Care Association, Centrelink, & Department of Family and Community Services, 2004; Higgins et al., 2005).

### What does foster care cost?

Recurrent expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care services was approximately billion across Australia in 2007–08. Nationally, out-of-home care services accounted for the majority (64% or \$1.3 billion) of this expenditure (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2009). A study by the Social Policy Research Centre found that the cost of caring for children in foster care is, on average, 52% higher than the costs of caring for other children not in care (McHugh, 2002).



**Table 3. Standard subsidy rates to foster carers across states and territories, as at 1 July 2006**

Age	TAS (1/7/05) <sup>2,3</sup>	WA (1/3/06) <sup>2</sup>	NT (1/7/06) <sup>2</sup>	SA (1/7/06) <sup>2</sup>	VIC (1/7/06) <sup>2</sup>	ACT <sup>4</sup> (1/7/06) <sup>2</sup>	QLD (1/7/06) <sup>2</sup>	NSW <sup>5</sup> (1/7/06) <sup>2</sup>
2	130	109	114	94	119	122	135	187
3	86	109	114	94	119	122	135	187
4	86	109	114	94	119	122	135	187
5	110	109	123	101	119	138	135	210
6	110	109	123	101	119	138	158	210
7	110	137	123	101	119	138	158	210
8	110	137	148	108	124	161	158	210
9	110	137	148	108	124	161	158	210
10	129	137	148	108	124	161	158	210
11	129	137	148	108	141	161	192	210
12	129	137	167	131	141	184	192	210
13	129	165	167	131	190	184	192	210
14	169	165	167	131	190	184	192	282
15	169	165	201	161	190	222	192	282
16	169	165	201	161	190	222	182	282
17	138	165	201	161	190	222	182	282

Notes: (1) All amounts quoted above are rounded to the nearest dollar. These figures are only one component of many carer payments. State/territory policies and payments for contingencies and other child-related costs must also be considered in the broader payment context. (2) Indicates date on which payment first became operative. (3) The Tasmanian CPI is calculated in September–October each year and then back-dated and back-paid to 1 July. (4) The ACT rate was increased on 1 July 2006 by \$5 across the board, as a fuel compensation, on 1 July 2006. (5) New NSW subsidy payments and contingency payment arrangements were announced on 10 September 2006 and were back-dated to 1 July 2006.

Source: Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA), 2006

## What are some of the key issues/challenges in foster care in Australia today?

Many children in out-of-home-care still experience multiple placement changes (Ainsworth, 2001; Delfabbro, Barber, & Cooper, 2000; Forde, 1999). This can be a concern for young people in care. In a survey of 1,767 Queensland children and young people in care, almost 20% of respondents were worried about having to move to another placement in the next few months (Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, 2008).

Recruiting enough carers to cope with the increased demand for foster carers is a concern for most states and territories (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Rindfleisch, Bean, & Denby, 1998). Some are advocating for the professionalisation of foster carers in a bid to facilitate recruitment and help the increasing number of children coming into the system with complex and challenging behaviour problems (Butcher, 2005).

With the reliance on home-based care and the problems recruiting sufficient numbers of foster carers, there has a rapid increase in the proportion of children in kinship

care (Ainsworth & Maluccio, 1998; Leslie, Landsverk, Horton, Granger, & Newton, 2000). It is now often considered to be the preferred option of alternative care for the child (Beeman & Boisen, 1999). However, at this stage, there is insufficient research evidence to demonstrate whether or not kinship care produces better outcomes for children (Bromfield & Osborn, 2007a, 2007b).

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