



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare**

# Child protection Australia

2016–17





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Health and Welfare**

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# **Child protection Australia**

**2016–17**

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

# Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
ARIA+	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CP NMDS	Child Protection National Minimum Data Set
DSS	Department of Social Services
IRSAD	Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
RA	Remoteness Area
RoGS	Report on Government Services
SA	South Australia
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

# Symbols

<	less than
—	rounded to zero
..	not applicable
n.a.	not available
0	zero



# Summary

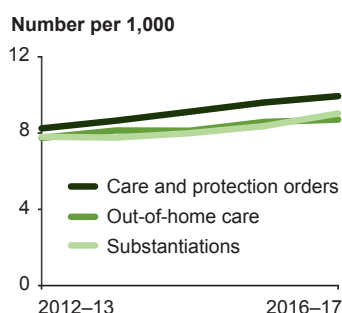
This report is the 21st comprehensive annual report on child protection. It includes detailed statistical information on state and territory child protection and support services, and selected characteristics of children receiving these services.

## Key findings



### One in 32 children received child protection services, with 74% being repeat clients

In 2016–17, 168,352 (1 in 32) children had an investigation, care and protection order and/or were placed in out-of-home care.



### Rates for children who were the subject of substantiations, on care and protection orders, and in out-of-home care continued to rise

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, rates of children:

- who were the subject of a substantiation rose from 7.8 to 9.0 per 1,000 children
- on care and protection orders rose from 8.2 to 9.9 per 1,000
- in out-of-home care rose from 7.7 to 8.7 per 1,000.



### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continued to be over-represented

In 2016–17, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 7 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services.



### Children from remote areas had the highest rates of substantiations

In 2016–17, children from *Very remote* areas were 4 times as likely as those from *Major cities* to be the subject of a substantiation.



### The majority of children in relative/kinship placements were with grandparents

At 30 June 2017, more than half (52%) of children in relative/kinship placements were placed with grandparents.



### About 32,600 children had been in out-of-home care for 2 or more years

Of children who were in long-term out-of-home care in 2016–17:

- 24% lived with a third-party carer who had long-term legal responsibility for them
- 62% were under the long-term legal responsibility of the state or territory.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Child protection overview

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

Children and young people are those aged under 18. This includes unborn children in jurisdictions where they are covered under the child protection legislation. In this report, unborn children are reported as a separate age group in tables where data are broken down by age (where applicable).

A number of government and non-government organisations share a common duty of care towards the protection of children and young people. 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 various services.

In 2016–17, the national recurrent expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care services was \$4.3 billion, a real increase of \$327.3 million (8%) from 2015–16 (SCRGSP 2018).

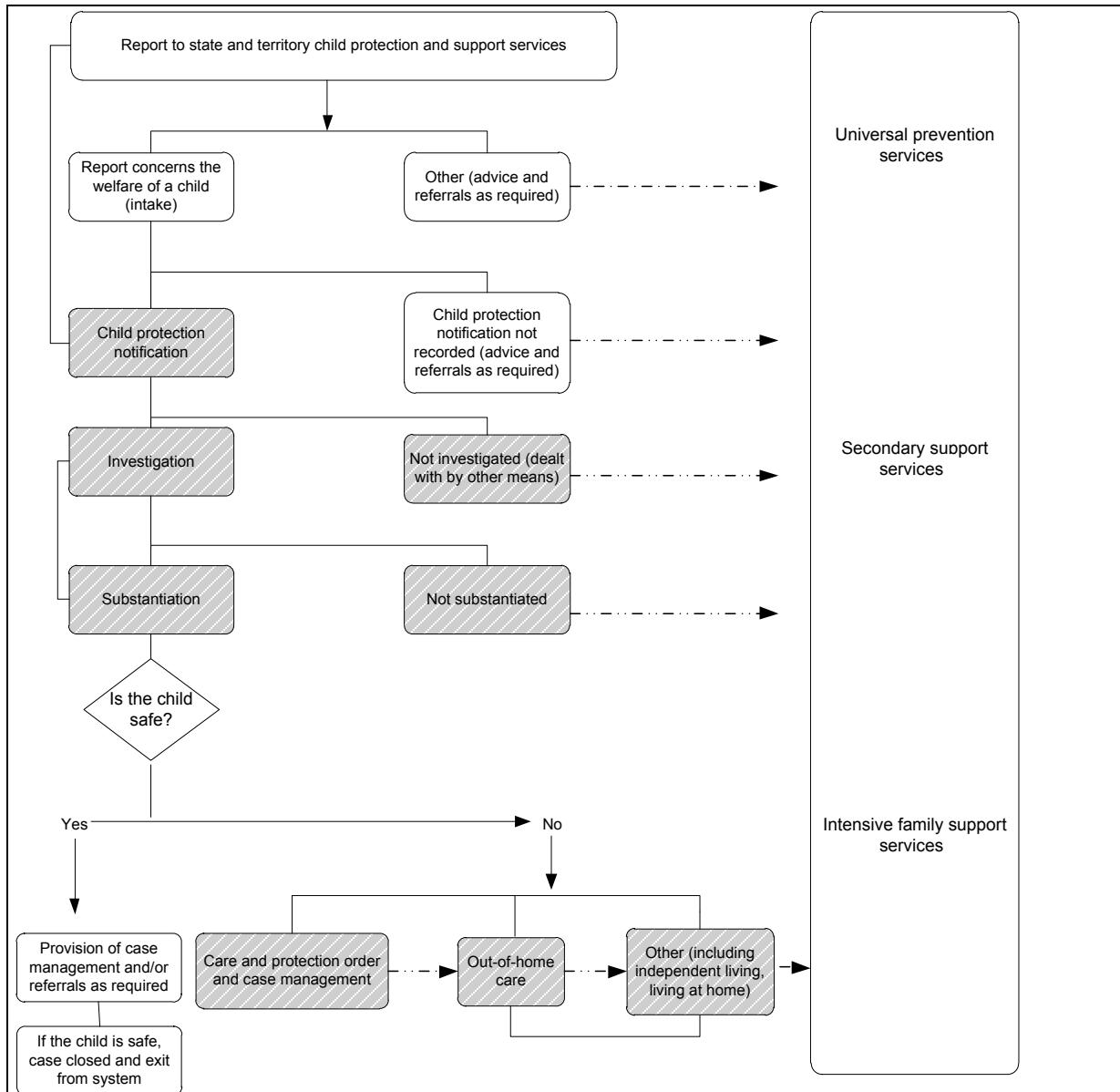
### Child protection processes

The broad processes in child protection systems are similar across Australia. A simplified version of the main processes is shown in Figure 1.1, and described in more detail in Box 1.1.

Children in need of protection can come into contact with departments responsible for child protection through various avenues. Reports of concern about a child may be made by community members, professionals (such as police, school personnel, or health practitioners), the children themselves, their parent(s), or another relative. These reports may relate to abuse and neglect, or to broader family concerns, such as economic problems or social isolation.

Child protection intake services screen incoming reports to determine whether further action is required. The defined threshold for intervention varies across jurisdictions, and this can lead to jurisdictional differences in the responses taken to initial reports. Reports that are deemed to require further action are generally classified as either a 'family support issue' or a 'child protection notification'.

Reports classified as requiring family support are further reviewed, and may be referred to support services. The National Child Protection Data Collection does not include reports that are not classified as child protection notifications.



**Notes**

1. Shaded boxes are items for which data are collected nationally.
2. Dashed lines indicate that clients may or may 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.

**Figure 1.1: Child protection process in Australia**

## **Box 1.1: Child protection statutory processes**

### **Notifications, investigations, and substantiations**

Child protection notifications are assessed to determine whether an investigation is required, whether referral to support services is more appropriate, or whether no further protective action is necessary.

An investigation aims to obtain more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification, and to determine whether the notification is 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated'.

A substantiation means there is sufficient reason (after an investigation) to believe the child has been, is being, or is likely to be abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. The relevant department will then attempt to ensure the safety of the child or children through an appropriate level of continued involvement, including providing support services to the child and family.

### **Care and protection orders**

In situations where further intervention is required, the department may apply to the relevant court to place the child on a care and protection order. Court is usually a last resort—for example, where the family is unable to provide safe care, where other avenues for resolving the situation have been exhausted, or where the extended family is unable to provide safe alternatives for care of children. The level of departmental involvement that a care and protection order mandates will vary depending on the type of order (see Box 4.1).

### **Out-of-home care**

Some children are placed in out-of-home care because they were the subject of a child protection substantiation, and need a more protective environment. Children may also be placed in out-of-home care when their parents are incapable of providing adequate care for them, or when alternative accommodation is needed during times of family conflict. There are no national data available on the reasons children are placed in out-of-home care (see Box 5.1 for the national categories of out-of-home care).

Out-of-home care is considered an intervention of last resort, with the current emphasis being to keep children with their families wherever possible. When children need to be placed in out-of-home care, an attempt is made to subsequently reunite children with their families. If it is necessary to remove a child from their family, placement within the wider family or community is preferred. This is particularly the case with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (see 'Section 5.2 Children in out-of-home care', particularly Box 5.4).

### **Family support services**

Family support services include programs that:

- seek to prevent family dysfunction and child maltreatment from occurring
- provide treatment, support, and advice to families
- offer more intensive programs to assist the most vulnerable families (COAG 2009).

Family support services may be used instead of, or as a complementary service to, a statutory child protection response, and may include developing parenting and household skills, therapeutic care, and family reunification services.

Chapter 7 presents some information about a subset of family support services—intensive support services.

## **Child protection policies and practices**

Child protection policies and practices are under continual development across jurisdictions. In recent years, there has been an increasing national focus on early intervention and family support services, to help prevent families entering or re-entering the child protection system, and to help minimise the need for more intrusive interventions (AIFS: Bromfield & Holzer 2008).

Most jurisdictions have enacted strategies that attempt to assist families in a more holistic way, by coordinating service delivery, and providing better access to different types of child and family services (COAG 2014).

### **Jurisdictional policy context**

Although the processes used across jurisdictions to protect children are broadly similar (AIFS: Bromfield & Higgins 2005; Figure 1.1), some important differences between jurisdictions' child protection policies and practices should be taken into account when making cross-jurisdiction comparisons. Key differences across jurisdictional policy are briefly discussed in this section, with further details relating to each jurisdiction's policy and practice are provided in Appendixes C–E (online) at <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material>>.

### **Mandatory reporting**

Commonwealth and jurisdiction-specific legislation governs the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect. However, there is variation regarding who is legally obliged to report it to the appropriate authority. Further details about mandatory reporting are available on the AIHW website at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-welfare-services/child-protection/child-protection-legislation-by-jurisdiction](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-welfare-services/child-protection/child-protection-legislation-by-jurisdiction)>.

### **Notifications, investigations, and substantiations**

The policies for assessing child protection notifications vary broadly across jurisdictions. This might result in higher levels of notifications being recorded in jurisdictions where all reports are recorded as notifications ('caller-defined') than in those where the initial report is only considered a notification when the information received suggests that a child needs care or protection ('agency-defined').

Between initial reports and substantiation, various activities take place that are broadly categorised as investigations. In jurisdictions where a preliminary assessment has occurred, activities tend to assess risk of significant harm, and focus on formal investigation. In jurisdictions where all initial contacts are recorded as notifications, a preliminary assessment will often occur to determine the need for formal investigation, followed by a formal investigation if it is concluded that a child might be or have been at risk of harm. In all jurisdictions, formal investigation determines whether the notification has been substantiated.

Thresholds for what is substantiated vary—some jurisdictions substantiate the harm or risk of harm to the child, and others substantiate actions by parents, or incidents that might cause harm. In considering harm to the child, the focus of the child protection systems in many jurisdictions has shifted away from the actions of parents to the outcomes for the child.

As well as policy variation at the jurisdictional level, the definition of what constitutes child abuse and neglect has broadened at a national level over time (AIFS: Holzer & Bromfield 2008). These changes affect the comparability of data included in this report across jurisdictions and over time. Legislative, policy, and definition differences between jurisdictions, as well as detailed information on recent policy and practices changes are

outlined in Appendixes C–E (online) at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)>.

## **National policy context**

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concluded on 15 December 2017. Volume 12 of its final report provides comprehensive coverage of responses to sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care settings (from 1990 onwards).

In private sessions, 257 survivors told the Royal Commission that they were sexually abused in contemporary out-of-home care settings. Of these:

- 66% said they were abused in home-based care (such as relative/kinship or foster care)
- 37% said they were abused in residential care.

Abuse in home-based care was more commonly reported among females, while abuse in residential care was more common among males.

Children in out-of-home care are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse, as separation from their family, and instability of placements can leave them isolated, and lacking established relationships with trusted adults. Potential perpetrators might take advantage of the opportunities for regular, unsupervised private interactions with children in out-of-home care, or might exploit the close relationships that develop between carers and children under their care (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2016).

More than 30 of the Royal Commissions' recommendations suggest changes to various aspects of the out-of-home care system, to help better protect vulnerable children from sexual abuse while in care. These broadly include:

- developing nationally agreed key terms and definitions of child sexual abuse for the purpose of national data collection and reporting
- improving the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS) to:
  - better identify children with a disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
  - Include information about children who were the subject of a substantiation for sexual abuse while in out-of-home care, and characteristics about them, and the alleged abuse
- a nationally consistent approach to service delivery, recording, reporting, and information sharing for child sexual abuse in out-of-home care
- increased placement stability for children in the out-of-home care system
- improved training and support of staff and carers for children in out-of-home care, especially relative/kinship carers
- nationally consistent comprehensive assessment and accreditation protocols for carers across government and non-government out-of-home care providers, with annual reviews of carer authorisations
- promoting a culture that supports disclosure of child sexual abuse for children in out-of-home care, and development of educational strategies to help prevent child sexual abuse
- increased protections to reduce the likelihood of sexual exploitation, particularly in residential care.

Some jurisdictions include cases of alleged abuse in out-of-home care in the data provided for this report on the number of notifications, investigations and substantiations; (see Appendix C (online) at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)>), but these cases cannot be separately identified in the national data.

### **Permanency reforms and early intervention**

In August 2017, community services ministers of the Australian and state and territory governments agreed to focus efforts in 2 key areas: providing stability for children in child protection, and ensuring the right services are available to prevent children entering child protection.

Ministers agreed to improve early intervention investment for children and families through a joint investment and evaluation approach. They also committed to reducing state guardianship of children in out-of-home care, by securing permanency outcomes for children who cannot be safely reunified with their families within a reasonable time.

To achieve this, ministers agreed to:

- include timeframes for permanent care decisions in child protection legislation and/or policy and practice, and report nationally on permanency timeframes that are achieved
- ensure permanency planning starts as soon as children come into contact with child protection services (concurrent planning), to avoid any delays in cases where children cannot be successfully reunited with family
- invest in the recruitment, training, and support of more permanent carers, including kinship carers, and to develop a consistent national process to reunite children with their families where it is safe to do so
- uphold all 5 domains of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, and support the roles and responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations to ensure culturally appropriate placements and supports for Indigenous children and their families (Seselja 2017).

## **1.2 Child protection data components**

### **Data sources**

#### **National child protection data**

The state and territory departments and the AIHW jointly fund the annual collation, analysis, and publication of child protection data. Data in this report are largely drawn from the CP NMDS, implemented for reporting from 2012–13. The CP NMDS consists of a number of unit record (child-level) files, extracted from state and territory child protection administrative data sets according to nationally agreed definitions and technical specifications.

Metadata for the CP NMDS are available on METeOR, the AIHW's online metadata repository, and can be accessed at <<http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/656494>>.

A data quality statement for the CP NMDS is also available at <<http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/691095>>.



Data are collected at unit record-level for all jurisdictions except New South Wales. Data for New South Wales are based on aggregate data, using the methodology predating the CP NMDS. Other jurisdictions also supplied data in aggregate format for tables where unit record data were not available. This includes all data relating to the use of intensive family support services for all jurisdictions.

National child protection data are analysed and published annually in:

- *Child protection Australia 2016–17* (this report)
- annual reports to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on progress in implementing the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020 (COAG 2012, 2013, 2014; DSS 2015a)
- online national framework indicators, available at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/nfpac](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/nfpac)>
- the Productivity Commission’s *Report on government services 2018* (SCRGSP 2018). For all jurisdictions except New South Wales, most data reported for 2016–17 in the *Report on government services 2018* were from the CP NMDS. Data for New South Wales were based on aggregate data. Some data included in this report might not match data reported in the *Report on government services* due to retrospective updates to state/territory data, and differences in the data extraction and analysis methodologies.

## Scope and limitations of the CP NMDS

National child protection data are based on those cases reported to departments responsible for child protection, so are likely to understate the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect across Australia. 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 are 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 who are the subject of substantiations. But there might be some small level of double-counting due to movement between jurisdictions.

## This report

This report presents information on state and territory child protection and support services, and some of the characteristics of the children who receive these services, as well as information on carers and intensive family support services. 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.

The supplementary data tables referred to in this report (those with a prefix of S) are available from <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/data](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/data)>.

Technical notes for some analyses used in this report are available in Appendix B. Appendixes C–E (online) at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)> contain additional information on legislation, policy, data systems, data comparability, and inquiries across jurisdictions of relevance to child protection reporting.

## 2 Children receiving child protection services

In this report, children receiving child protection services are defined as those children who, in the reporting period, were:

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

### 2.1 Child protection services received

In 2016–17, 168,352 children received child protection services (Figure 2.1), a rate of 30.8 per 1,000 children aged 0–17.

Of children receiving child protection services in 2016–17:

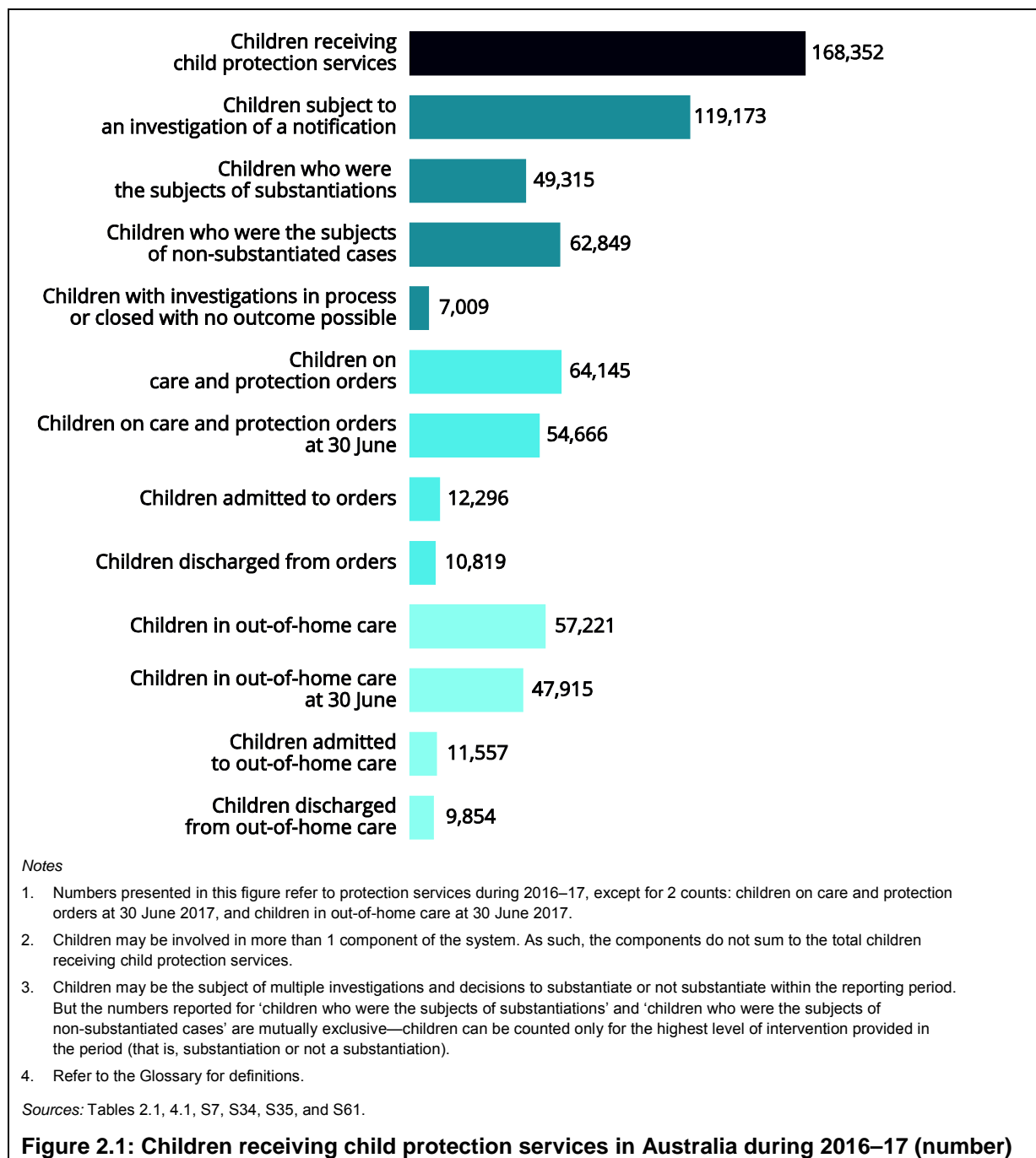
- 119,173 were the subject of an investigation (21.8 per 1,000)
- 64,145 were on a care and protection order (11.7 per 1,000)
- 57,221 were in out-of-home care (10.5 per 1,000).

These rates varied across jurisdictions (Table 2.1). The key differences that can affect these data are outlined in Appendix C (online) at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)>.

Children may 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 (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. This is because, apart from an initial risk assessment, it is expected that the department responsible for child protection would have limited involvement with these children and their families.

Children who received intensive family support services only have also not been included in this section, as unit record-level data were not available for national reporting. See Chapter 7 for information about children receiving intensive family support services.



**Table 2.1: Children receiving child protection services, by states and territories, 2016–17 (number and rate)**

Child protection component	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT <sup>(a)</sup>	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>									
Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification	50,398	27,979	18,775	10,744	2,854	1,266	1,281	5,876	119,173
Children on care and protection orders	22,559	16,264	11,298	5,953	4,193	1,481	1,007	1,390	64,145
Children in out-of-home care	20,581	13,001	10,958	5,112	3,951	1,353	939	1,326	57,221
<b>Children receiving child protection services</b>	<b>66,689</b>	<b>40,415</b>	<b>28,634</b>	<b>15,282</b>	<b>6,194</b>	<b>2,605</b>	<b>2,008</b>	<b>6,525</b>	<b>168,352</b>
<b>Number per 1,000</b>									
Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification	29.1	20.5	16.4	18.2	7.8	11.2	14.2	93.8	21.8
Children on care and protection orders	13.0	11.9	9.9	10.1	11.5	13.1	11.2	22.2	11.7
Children in out-of-home care	11.9	9.5	9.6	8.7	10.8	12.0	10.4	21.2	10.5
<b>Children receiving child protection services</b>	<b>38.5</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>104.1</b>	<b>30.8</b>

(a) Out-of-home care data for the ACT includes some young people aged 18 and over whose carers receive a full carer payment. This is generally to facilitate completion of schooling without change to the placement.

*Notes*

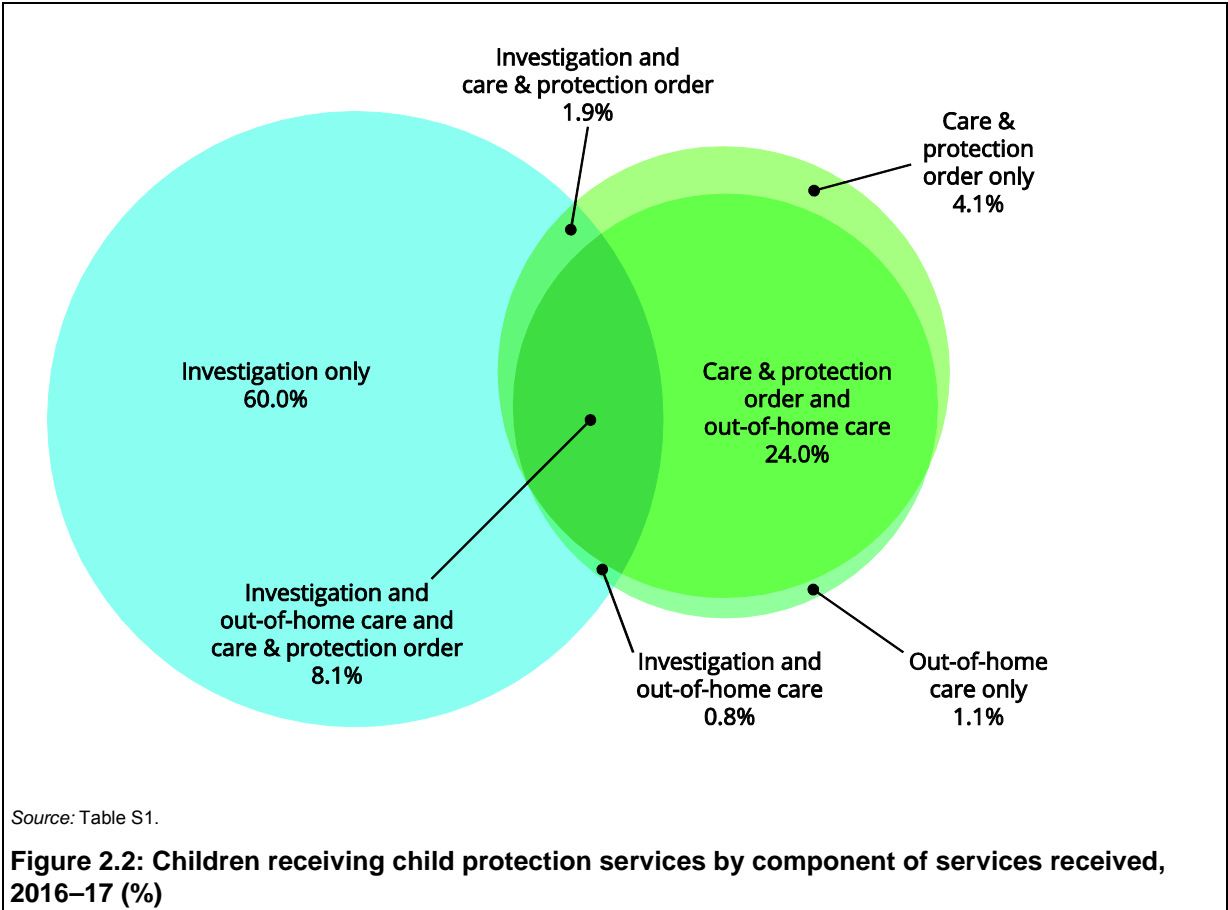
1. 'Children receiving child protection services' is defined as 1 or more of the following occurring within the reporting period: an investigation of a notification, a child being on a care and protection order, or a child being in out-of-home care. It is not a total count of these 3 areas, but a count of unique children across the 3 areas.
2. See Appendix B: Technical notes for the methodology used to calculate rates, and to Table S63 for the population data.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017.

Because children may receive a combination of child protection services, there are links and overlaps between the data for: the notification, investigation, and substantiation; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care data collections.

In 2016–17, 60% of children receiving child protection services were the subject of an investigation only, and almost one-quarter (24%) of children were both on an order and in out-of-home care (Figure 2.2). Overall, 8% of children were involved in all 3 components of the system.

The degree of overlap across the system components has been broadly similar between 2013–14 and 2016–17 (AIHW 2015, 2016a, 2017b).



Children who were the subject of an investigation only represented a large component of the analysis of unique children receiving services. For 61% of these children maltreatment was not substantiated 2016–17 (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2: Children who were the subject of a finalised investigation only in 2016–17, by investigation outcome, states and territories (number and %)**

Investigation outcome	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
	<b>Number</b>								
Substantiated	15,038	11,077	4,048	3,660	914	601	161	1,589	37,088
Not substantiated	27,074	11,111	11,068	4,029	757	256	681	2,483	57,459
<i>Total children in finalised investigations</i>	<i>42,112</i>	<i>22,188</i>	<i>15,116</i>	<i>7,689</i>	<i>1,671</i>	<i>857</i>	<i>842</i>	<i>4,072</i>	<i>94,547</i>
	<b>%</b>								
Substantiated	35.7	49.9	26.8	47.6	54.7	70.1	19.1	39.0	39.2
Not substantiated	64.3	50.1	73.2	52.4	45.3	29.9	80.9	61.0	60.8
<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>
<b>Total children who were the subject of an investigation only</b>	<b>42,929</b>	<b>23,066</b>	<b>16,666</b>	<b>9,193</b>	<b>1,940</b>	<b>1,091</b>	<b>986</b>	<b>5,135</b>	<b>101,006</b>

*Note:* This table includes data for children whose only contact with child protection services during 2016–17 was an investigation. It excludes those children 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 relating to investigation outcome are further restricted to include only those for whom an investigation was finalised in the reporting period, thus excluding investigations in process or closed with no outcome possible. Data for all children who were the subject of substantiations are available in Table S7.

*Source:* AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017.

## 2.2 Characteristics of children receiving child protection services

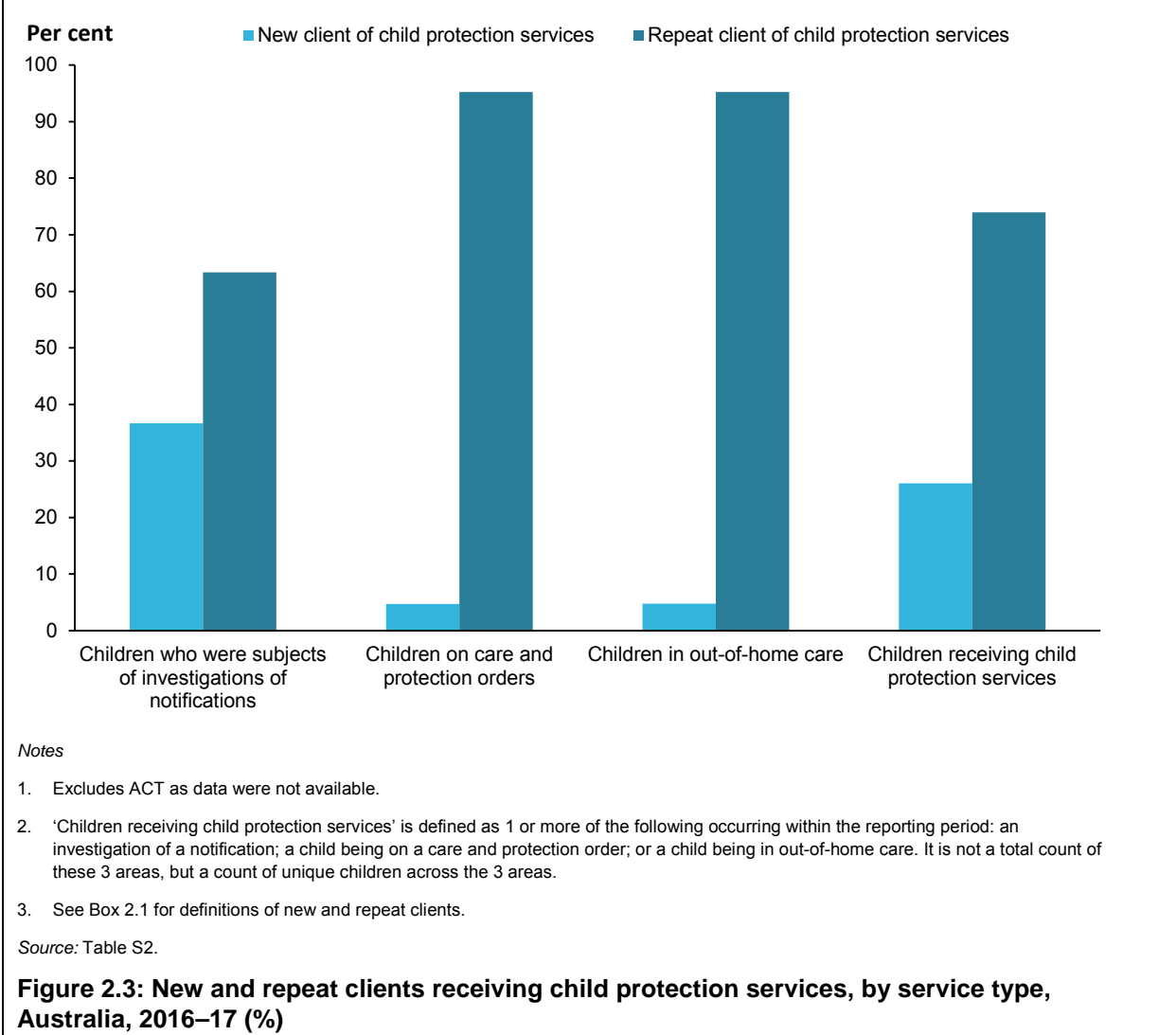
### New and repeat clients

Data on new and repeat clients provide some insight into whether child protection clients are primarily new children, or those who were previously involved in the system, and whether this differs across the system components. Definitions of new and repeat clients are provided in Box 2.1.

#### Box 2.1: Definition of new and repeat clients

- **New clients** 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.
- **Repeat clients** are children or young people who have previously been the subject of an investigation, or 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.

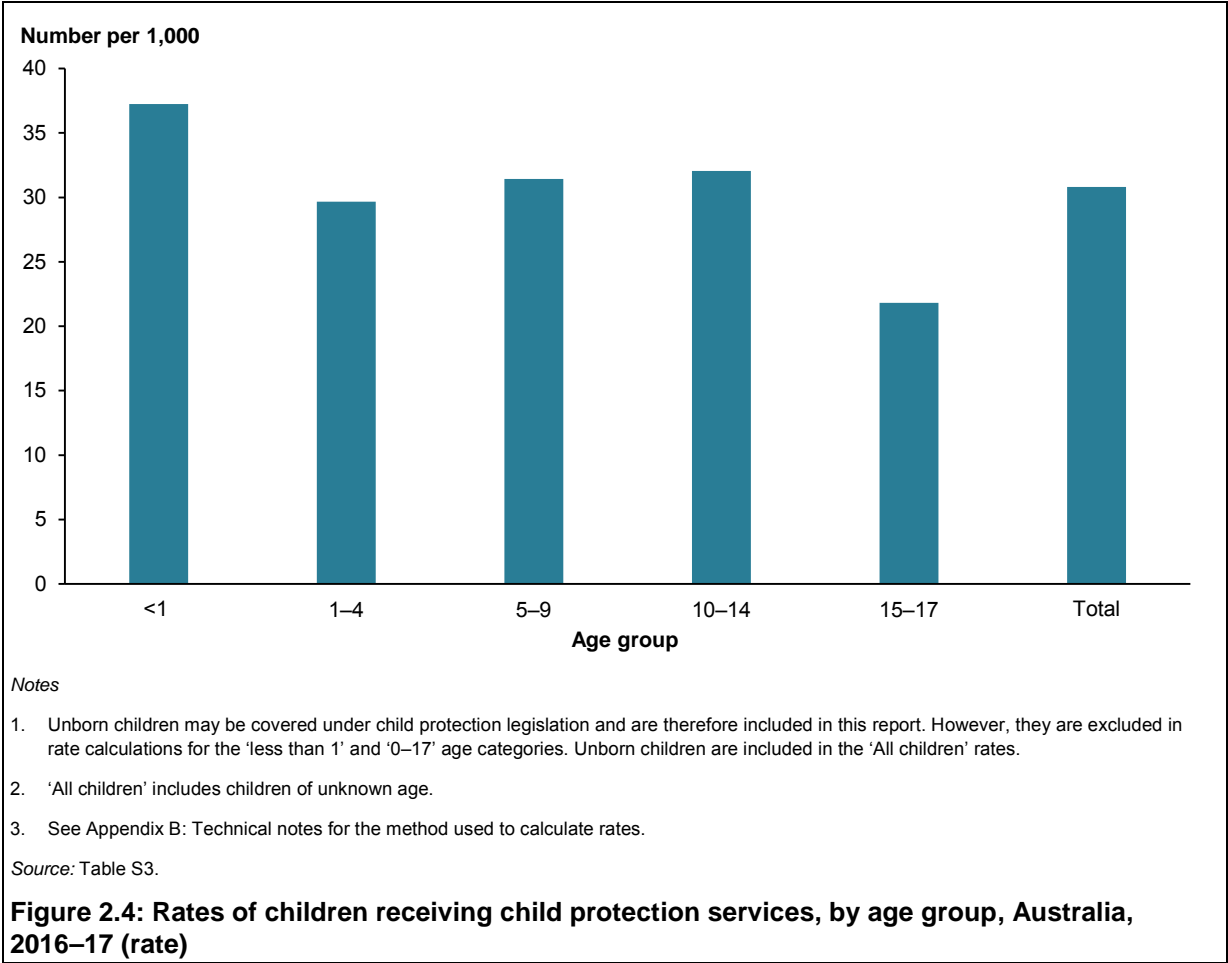
In 2016–17, almost three-quarters (74%) of children receiving child protection services were repeat clients (Figure 2.3). However, the percentage of repeat clients was substantially higher for those on an order or in out-of-home care (95% for both) than for those who were the subject of investigations (63%).



## Age

Across Australia in 2016–17, infants (children aged less than 1) (37.2 per 1,000 children) were most likely to have received child protection services, while those aged 15–17 were least likely (21.8 per 1,000) (Figure 2.4). The median age of children receiving services was 8.

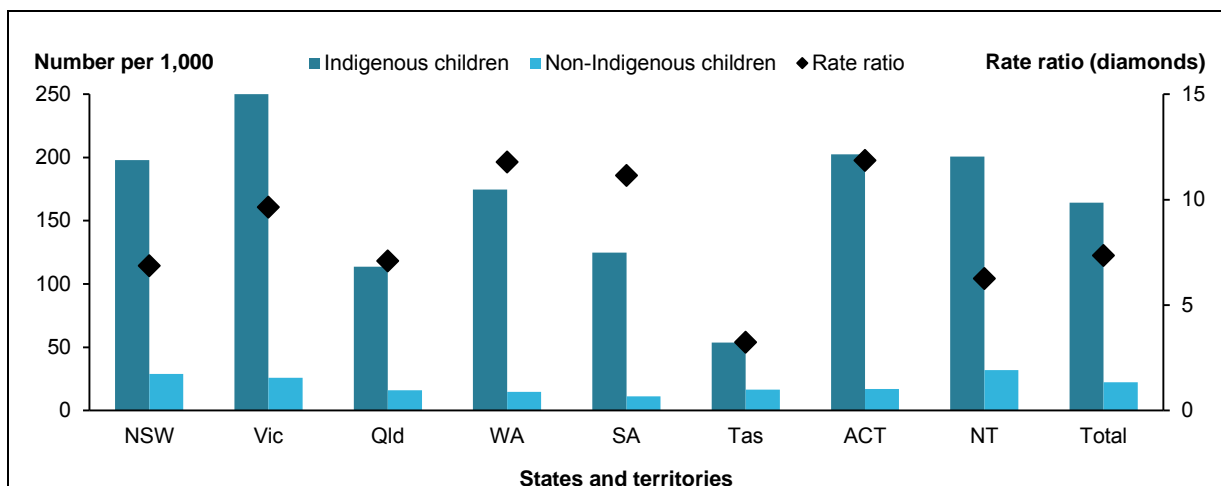
These findings highlight that younger children are the most vulnerable, and most jurisdictions have specific policies and procedures in place to protect them. There has also been an increased national focus on early intervention, and on providing services early in a child’s life to improve long-term outcomes, and reduce the negative impacts of trauma and harm (COAG 2009; DSS 2015b; FaHCSIA 2012).



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2016–17, 49,160 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children received child protection services—a rate of 164.3 per 1,000 children, compared with 22.3 per 1,000 for non-Indigenous children (Figure 2.5; Table S3). Indigenous children were 7 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services.





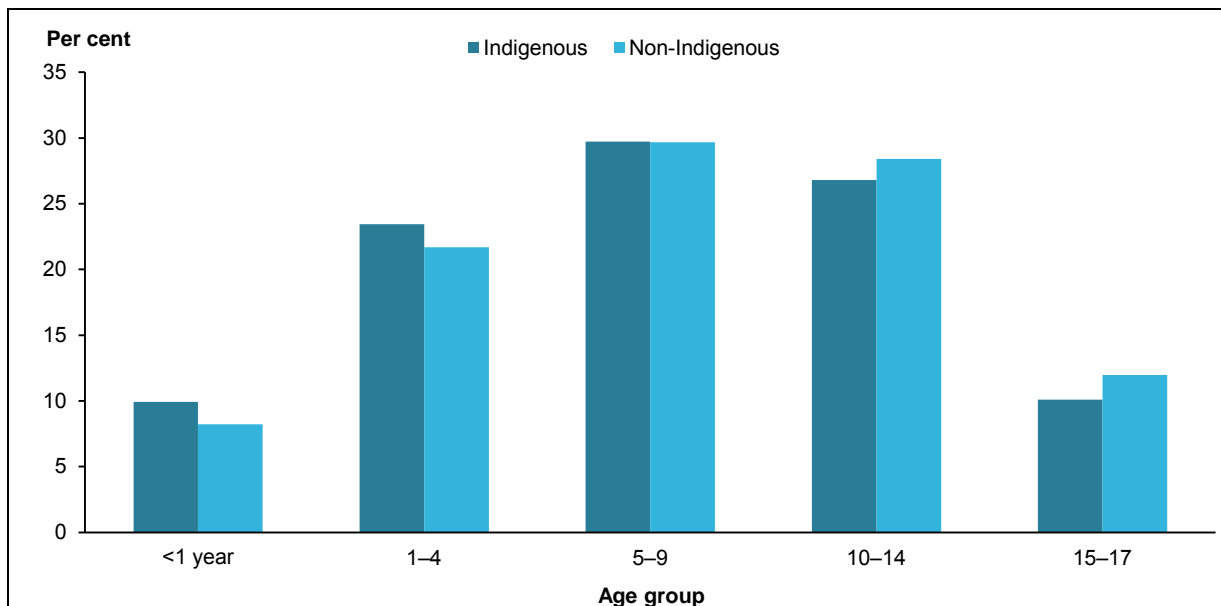
**Notes**

1. In Tas, the higher proportion of children with unknown Indigenous status might affect the reliability of the rate ratio calculation. Rate ratios should therefore be interpreted with caution.
2. See Appendix B: Technical notes for the methodology used to calculate rates.

Source: Table S3.

**Figure 2.5: Children receiving child protection services, by Indigenous status, states and territories, 2016–17 (rate and rate ratio)**

The median age for children who received child protection services was the same for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children (both with median ages of 8). A slightly higher proportion of Indigenous children (33%) were aged under 5, compared with 30% of non-Indigenous children (Figure 2.6).



Source: Table S3.

**Figure 2.6: Children receiving child protection services, by age group and Indigenous status, 2016–17 (%)**

## 2.3 National trends

### Trends relating to children

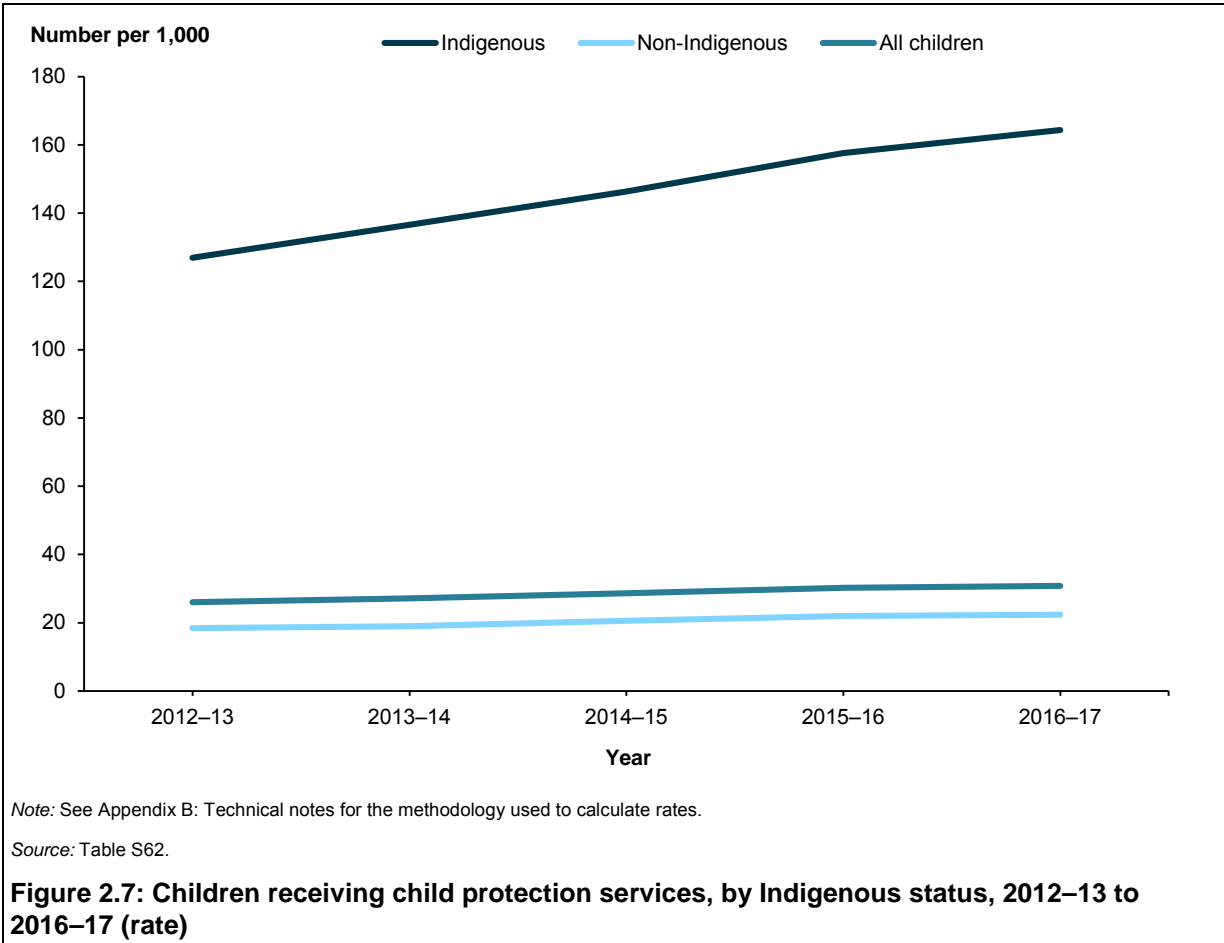
The number of children receiving child protection services rose by about 25% over 5 years—from 135,139 children in 2012–13 to 168,352 children in 2016–17 (Table S4). The rate of children receiving child protection services in Australia increased from 26.0 per 1,000 in 2012–13 to 30.8 per 1,000 in 2016–17 (Figure 2.7).

For state and territory trend data on the number and rate of children who received child protection services between 2012–13 and 2016–17, see tables A1 and A2.

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

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the rate of children receiving child protection services has increased for both Indigenous children (from 126.9 to 164.3 per 1,000) and non-Indigenous children (from 18.5 to 22.3 per 1,000). The rate of increase has been larger for Indigenous children (Figure 2.7).



### **3 Notifications, investigations, and substantiations**

This chapter contains information on the number of notifications, investigations, and substantiations (see Box 3.1), and the number of children who were the subject of these.

'Children and young people' are defined as those under the age of 18. This includes unborn children in jurisdictions where they are covered under the child protection legislation. In this report, unborn children are reported as a separate age group in tables disaggregated by age (where applicable).

The data in this chapter relate to notifications that departments responsible for child protection received between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017 (see Box 3.1 for further details).

### **Box 3.1: Notifications, investigations, and substantiations**

- **Notifications** consist of contacts made to an authorised department by persons or other bodies alleging child abuse or neglect, child maltreatment, or harm to a child. The National Child Protection Data Collection does not include reports that are not classified as child protection notifications. A notification can only involve 1 child. Where it is claimed that 2 children have been abused or neglected or harmed, this is counted as 2 notifications, even if the children are from 1 family. Where there is more than 1 notification about the same 'event' involving a child, this is counted as 1 notification. Where there is more than 1 notification for the same child between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017, but relating to different events, these are counted as separate notifications.
- **Investigations** are the processes whereby the relevant department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification received between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017. 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.
- **Finalised investigations** are those notifications made during 2016–17 that were investigated and had an outcome of either 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated' recorded by 31 August 2017. The cut-off point of 31 August allows time for investigating notifications made close to the end of the financial year. The outcomes of investigations that are still in process after this cut-off (4%, or 7,017 in 2016–17) are not reported in the data for this or subsequent reporting periods. As a result, substantiations reported in this report (that is, substantiations of notifications received during the year) are therefore an under-count of the actual number of substantiations made during the year, due to the use of this methodology in preceding reporting periods.
- **Substantiations** of notifications received during the current reporting year refer to child protection notifications made to relevant authorities during the year ended 30 June 2017 that were investigated, for which the investigation was finalised by 31 August 2017, and for which 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. Substantiations may also include cases where there is no suitable caregiver, such as children who have been abandoned or whose parents are deceased.

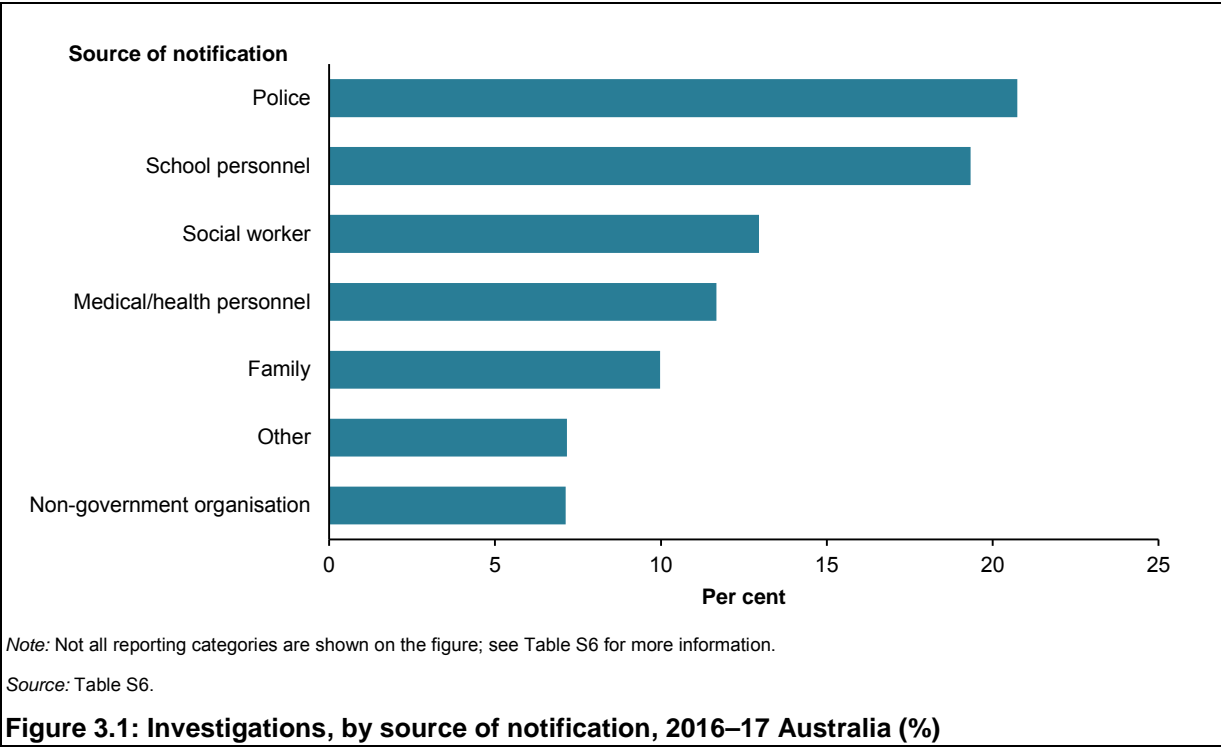
Instances of alleged abuse or neglect by family members (other than parents or guardians) and non-family members are generally included in the count of notifications if the notification was referred to the state and territory departments responsible for child protection. These cases are included in counts of investigations and substantiations only where there has been a finding or allegation of a failure to protect by the parent or guardian.

### 3.1 Cases and the children involved

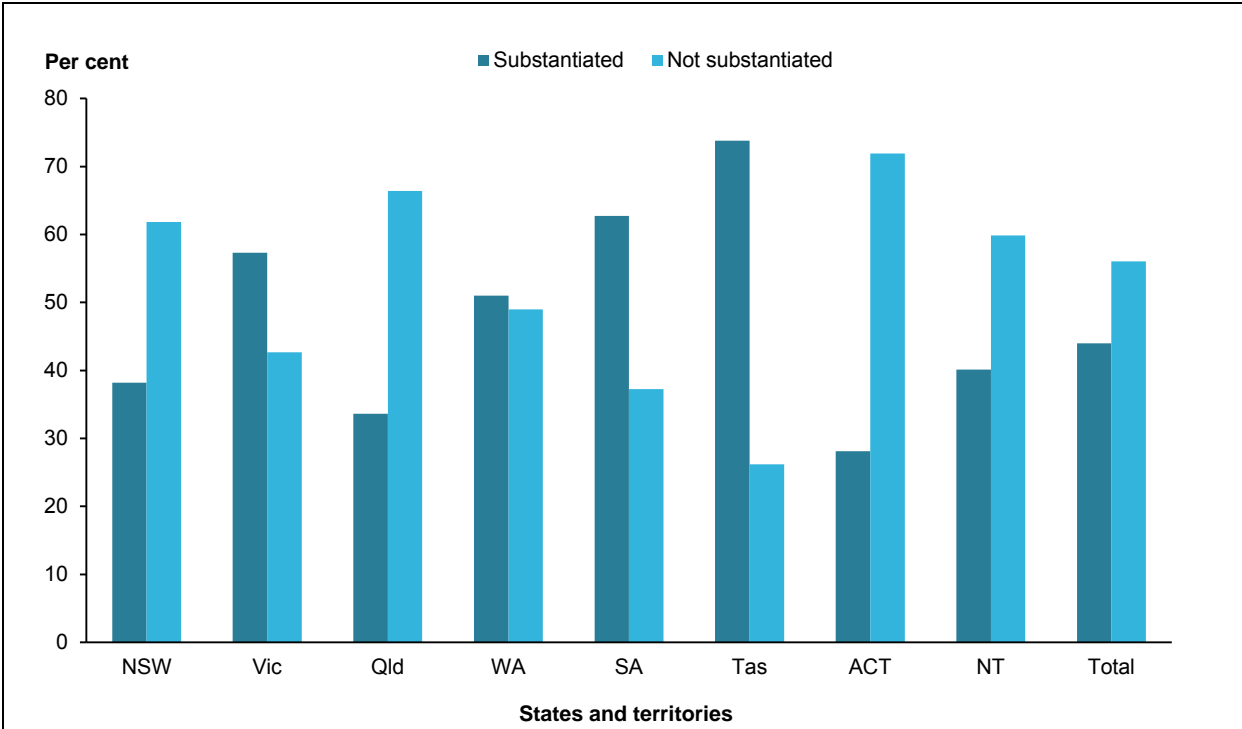
Of the 379,459 notifications in 2016–17, 177,056 (47%) were assessed as requiring further investigation, while the remaining 202,403 (53%) were dealt with by other means, such as by being referred to a support service (Table S5).

The number of notifications and the percentage of those notifications investigated are not comparable across jurisdictions, as legislation and policies that provide the framework for assessing child protection notifications vary broadly across jurisdictions.

For investigations in 2016–17, the most common source of the related notification was police (21%), followed by school personnel (19%) (Figure 3.1). Nationally, only 0.3% of notifications came directly from the child involved (Table S6). Notifications to departments responsible for child protection come from various sources, and legislation relating to mandatory reporting varies across jurisdictions. This should be taken into consideration when interpreting these data, for more details, see Appendixes C–E (online) <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)>.



Overall, less than half (44%) of the 112,164 children in finalised investigations were the subjects of substantiations in 2016–17 (Figure 3.2).



Source: Table S7.

**Figure 3.2: Children who were the subjects of finalised investigations, by outcome, states and territories, 2016–17 (%)**

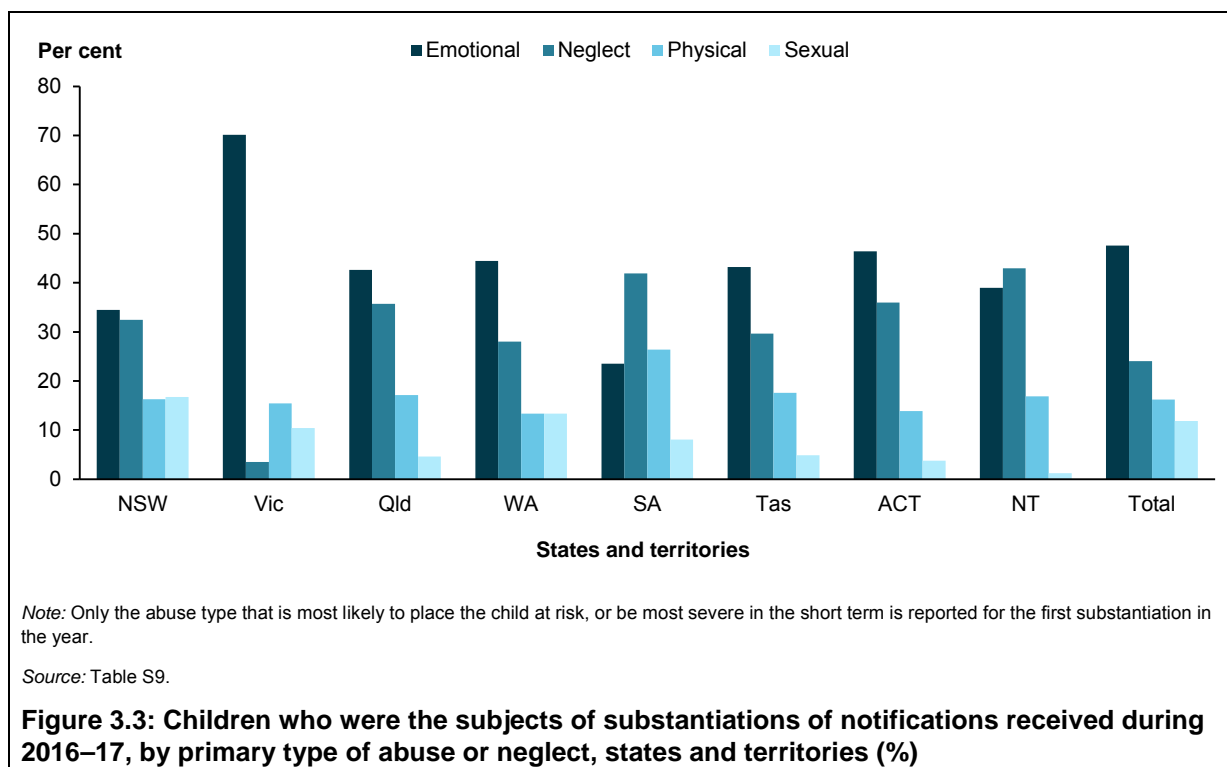
Children may be involved in multiple statutory child protection cases during any given year. Across Australia, in 2016–17, the 379,459 notifications involved 233,795 children, while the 67,968 substantiations involved 49,315 children (Table S61).

This shows that many children were the subject of more than 1 notification and/or substantiation during the year, with 1 in 5 (20%) being the subject of more than 1 substantiation (Table S8).

## Types of abuse and neglect

The type of abuse or neglect reported for children who were subjects of substantiations is the one 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.

Nationally, emotional abuse was the most common primary type of abuse or neglect substantiated for children (48%), followed by neglect (24%), physical abuse (16%), and sexual abuse (12%). However, there was some variation between jurisdictions (Figure 3.3).



Other types of abuse or neglect may also be recorded as part of the substantiation.

The co-occurrence of abuse and neglect refers to substantiations where both primary and other types of abuse were recorded.

Table 3.1 shows the co-occurrence of primary types of abuse or neglect with other types of abuse or neglect that were recorded. As well as being the most common primary types reported, emotional abuse and neglect were also the most likely types to co-occur, with average co-occurrences of 30% and 28%, respectively.

Emotional abuse co-occurred in just under half (45%) of all substantiations where physical abuse was the primary type of substantiated abuse or neglect, and in just under one-quarter (23%) of substantiations where sexual abuse was the primary type.

Neglect co-occurred in 32% of cases where emotional abuse was the primary type of substantiated abuse, and in 25% 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, with an average co-occurrence of 2% or less.

**Table 3.1: Co-occurrence of substantiated types of abuse and neglect, by primary type of abuse or neglect, 2016–17 (%)**

Primary type of abuse or neglect	Co-occurring type of abuse or neglect <sup>(a)(b)</sup>				Total number of substantiations <sup>(c)</sup>
	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Emotional abuse	Neglect	
Physical abuse	..	2.0	44.6	25.1	<b>11,043</b>
Sexual abuse	6.3	..	22.8	12.7	<b>7,863</b>
Emotional abuse	22.5	1.8	..	32.5	<b>30,745</b>
Neglect	6.4	1.0	23.4	..	<b>18,149</b>
<b>Average co-occurrence<sup>(d)</sup></b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>67,800</b>

(a) Excludes 3,955 cases for Qld 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. Therefore, the proportion of co-occurring abuse types may be understated.

(c) Excludes 168 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 2017.



## 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.

Across Australia in 2016–17, 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) (16.4 per 1,000 children) were most likely to be the subjects of substantiations, while those aged 15–17 were least likely (4.6 per 1,000 children).

This pattern was consistent across all jurisdictions (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2016–17, by age group, states and territories (rate)**

Age group (years)	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
<b>Number per 1,000</b>									
<1	16.4	24.1	7.8	12.0	15.7	12.4	9.2	59.1	16.4
1–4	10.8	11.7	5.2	8.4	5.2	9.1	3.6	33.6	9.4
5–9	10.4	11.4	5.1	8.2	3.9	6.4	3.8	30.5	8.9
10–14	10.9	11.5	4.8	7.4	3.0	5.5	3.0	28.8	8.8
15–17	6.3	5.9	2.1	3.2	1.3	2.2	1.5	16.0	4.6
0–17	10.3	11.3	4.7	7.5	4.2	6.3	3.5	30.5	8.7
<b>All children</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>9.0</b>
<b>Children subject to substantiations (number)</b>	<b>18,919</b>	<b>15,488</b>	<b>5,767</b>	<b>4,633</b>	<b>1,526</b>	<b>755</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>1,910</b>	<b>49,315</b>

### Notes

1. See Appendix B: Technical notes for the methodology used to calculate rates, Table S10 for the numbers, and Table S64 for population data.
2. Unborn children may be covered under child protection legislation and are therefore included in this report. However, 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. Finalised investigations, and thus substantiations, refer only to cases that were notified during the year, and finalised by 31 August 2017. This excludes finalised investigations that were notified in a previous reporting period (see Box 3.1 for the definition of a finalised investigation).

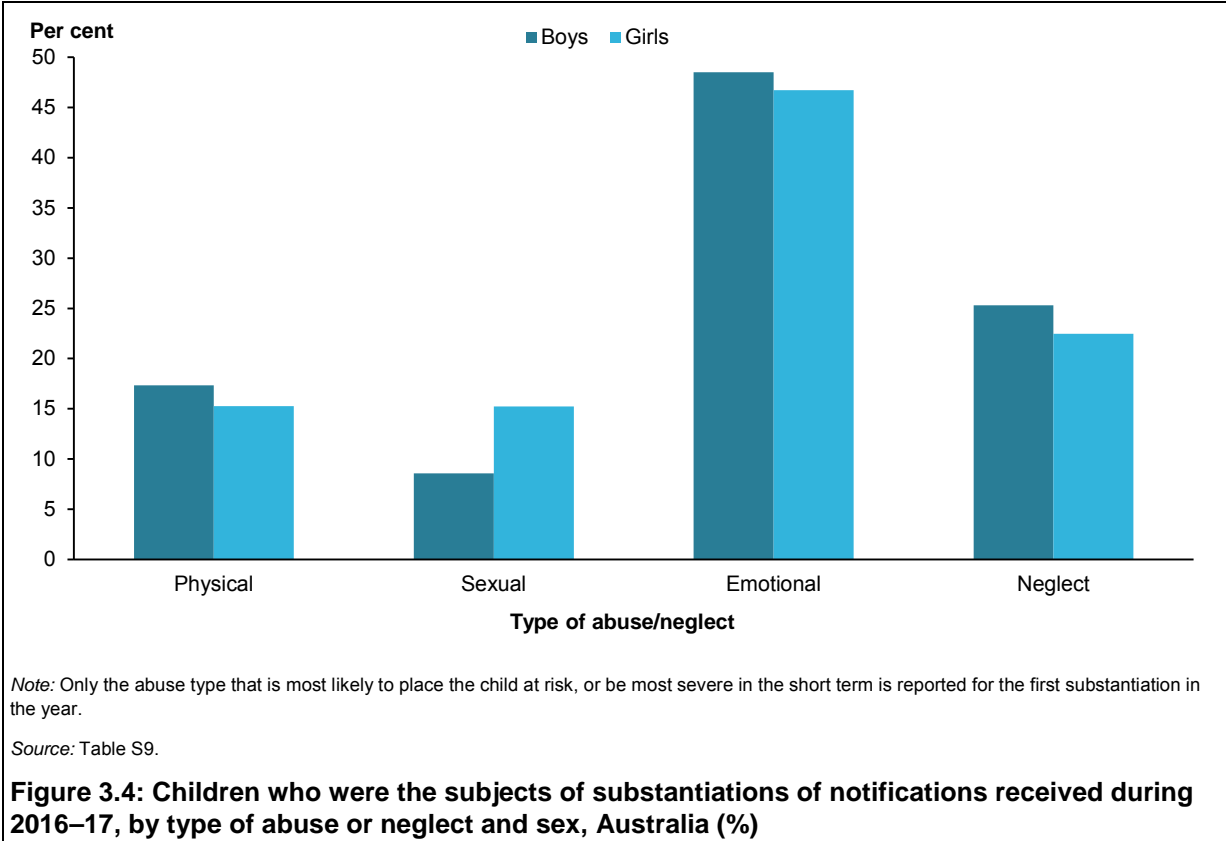
Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017.

## Sex

Of all children who were the subjects of substantiations, there were slightly more girls (24,738) than boys (23,995) (Table S9).

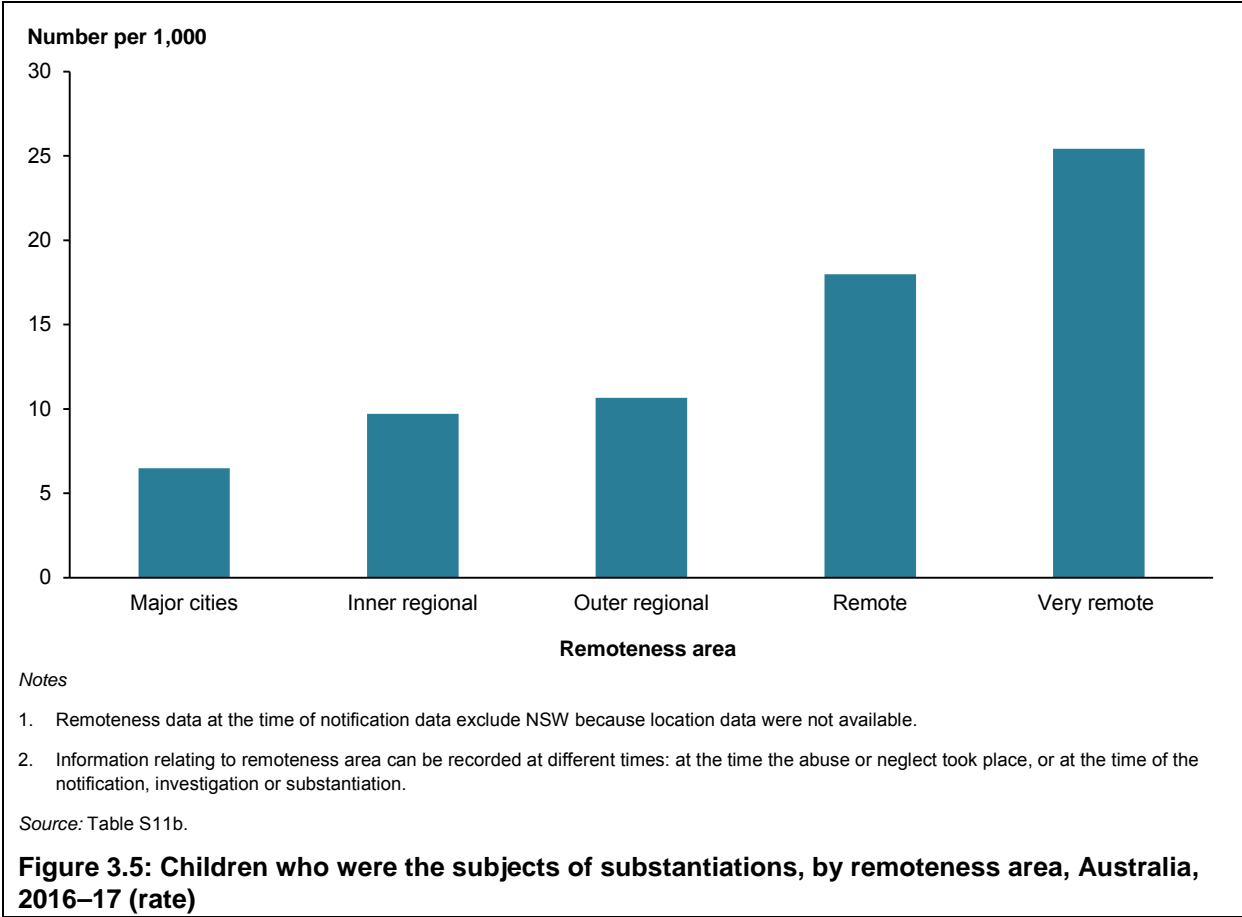
Nationally, and across all jurisdictions, girls (15%) were more likely to be the subjects of substantiations of sexual abuse than boys (9%) (Figure 3.4). This is consistent with recorded crime statistics for sexual assault (ABS 2017c).

Boys had slightly higher percentages of substantiations for neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse.

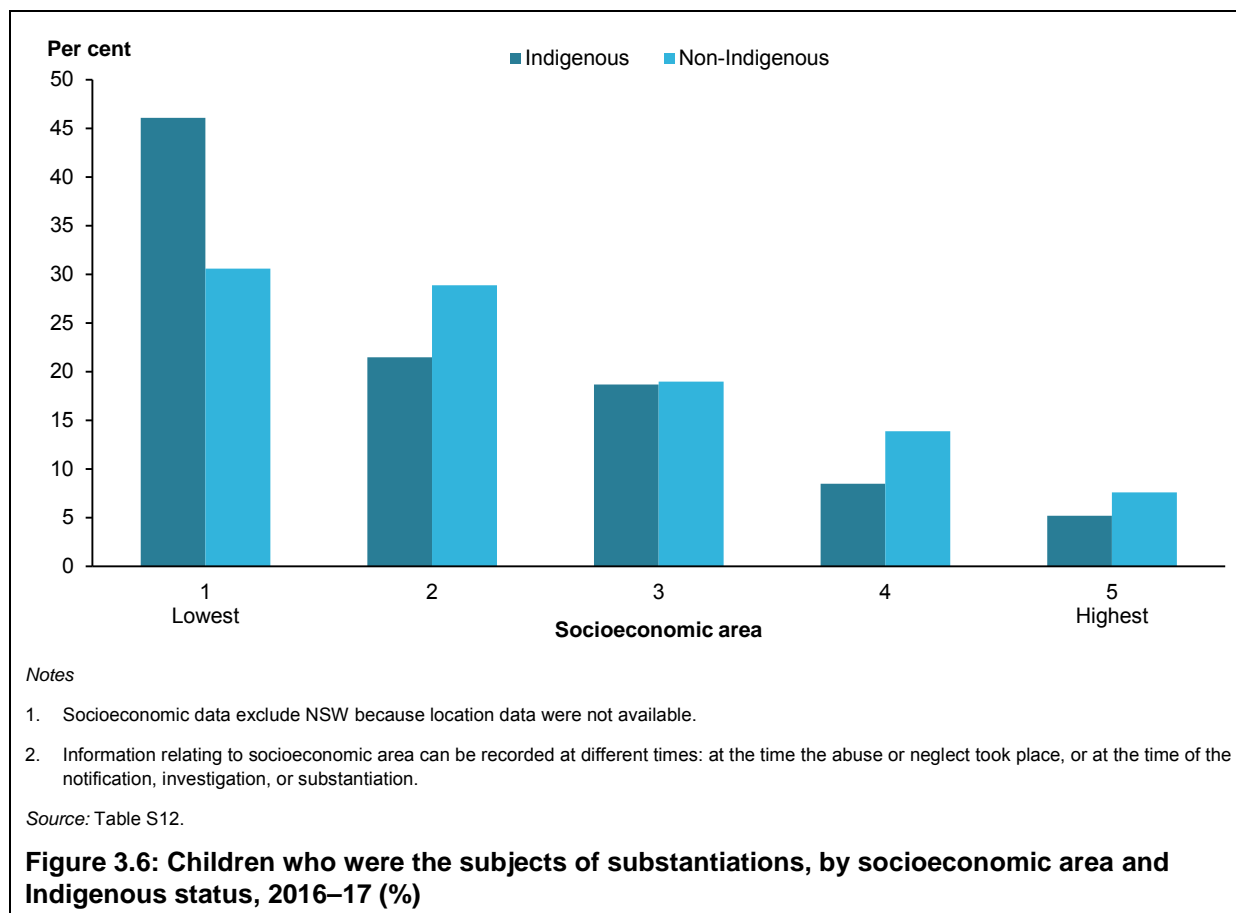


### Remoteness and socioeconomic areas

Overall, children from geographically remote areas had the highest rates of substantiations—children from *Very remote* areas (25.4 per 1,000) were 4 times as likely as those from *Major cities* to be the subject of a substantiation (6.5 per 1,000) (Figure 3.5).



Children who were the subjects of substantiations were more likely to be from the lowest socioeconomic areas (35% in the lowest socioeconomic area compared with 7% in the highest) (Table S12). Indigenous children who were the subjects of substantiations were far more likely to be from the lowest socioeconomic areas (46%) than non-Indigenous children (31%) (Figure 3.6).

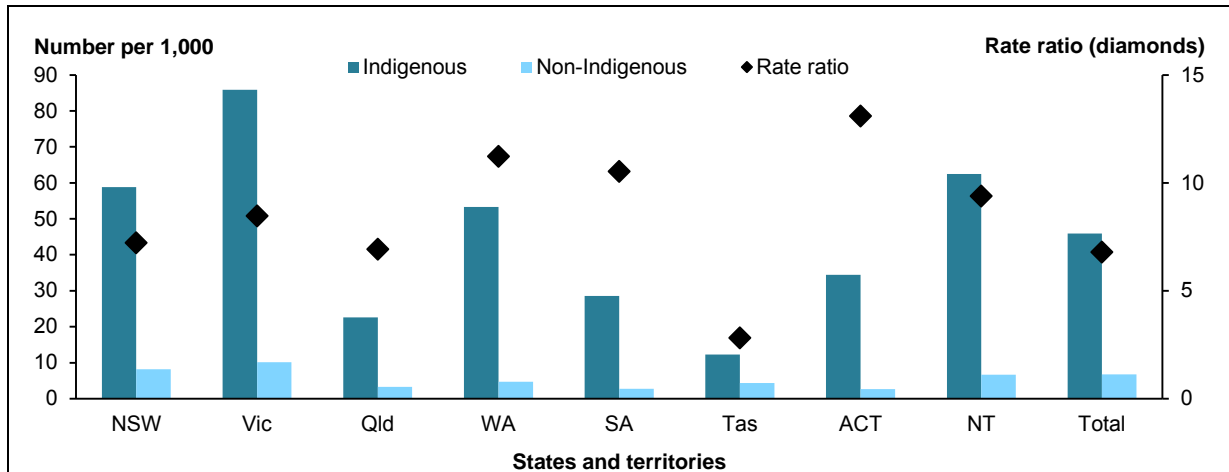


## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

In 2016–17, 13,749 (46.0 per 1,000) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were the subject of a child protection substantiation—almost 7 times the rate of non-Indigenous children (6.8 per 1,000) (Figure 3.7). This is consistent with findings for previous years (see Figure 3.13).

The reasons for the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection substantiations are complex. 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, and perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing practices are all underlying causes (HREOC 1997).

Drug and alcohol abuse and family violence might also be contributing factors (Scott & Nair 2013). Indigenous children are also over-represented in other areas related to child safety, including hospital admissions for injuries and assault, experiences of homelessness, and involvement in the youth justice system (AIHW 2014b).



**Notes**

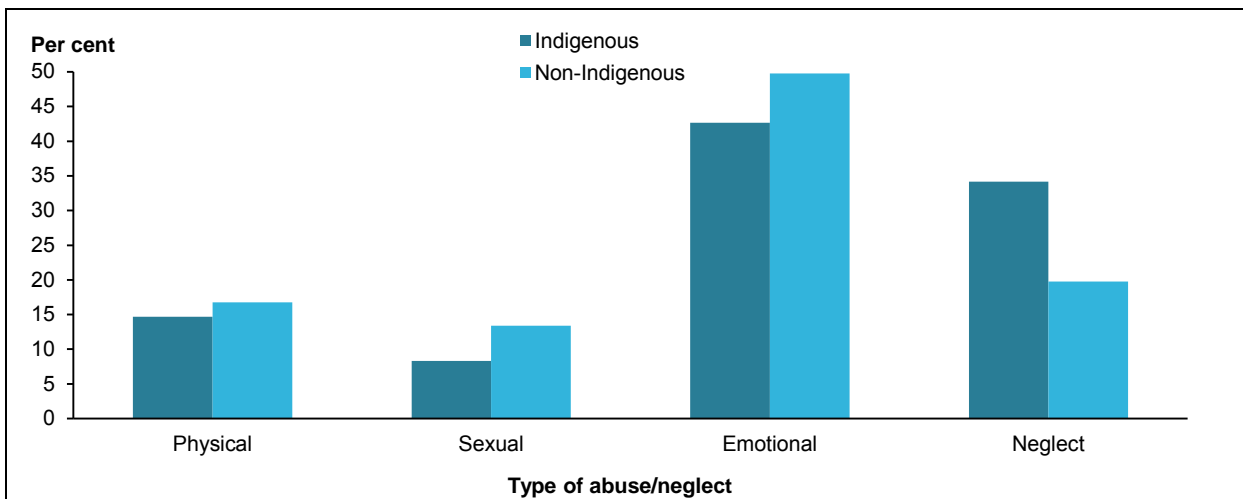
1. In Tas, the higher proportion of children with unknown Indigenous status may affect the reliability of the rate ratio calculation. Rate ratios should therefore be interpreted with caution.
2. See Appendix B: Technical notes for the methodology used to calculate rates and rate ratios.

Source: Table S13.

**Figure 3.7: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2016–17, by Indigenous status states and territories (rate and rate ratio)**

### Abuse and neglect type

Overall, emotional abuse and neglect were the most common types of substantiated abuse for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. Indigenous children (34%) had a higher percentage of substantiations for neglect than non-Indigenous children (20%), and a lower percentage for emotional, physical, and sexual abuse (Figure 3.8).



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

Source: Table S14.

**Figure 3.8: Children who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2016–17, by Indigenous status and type of abuse (%)**

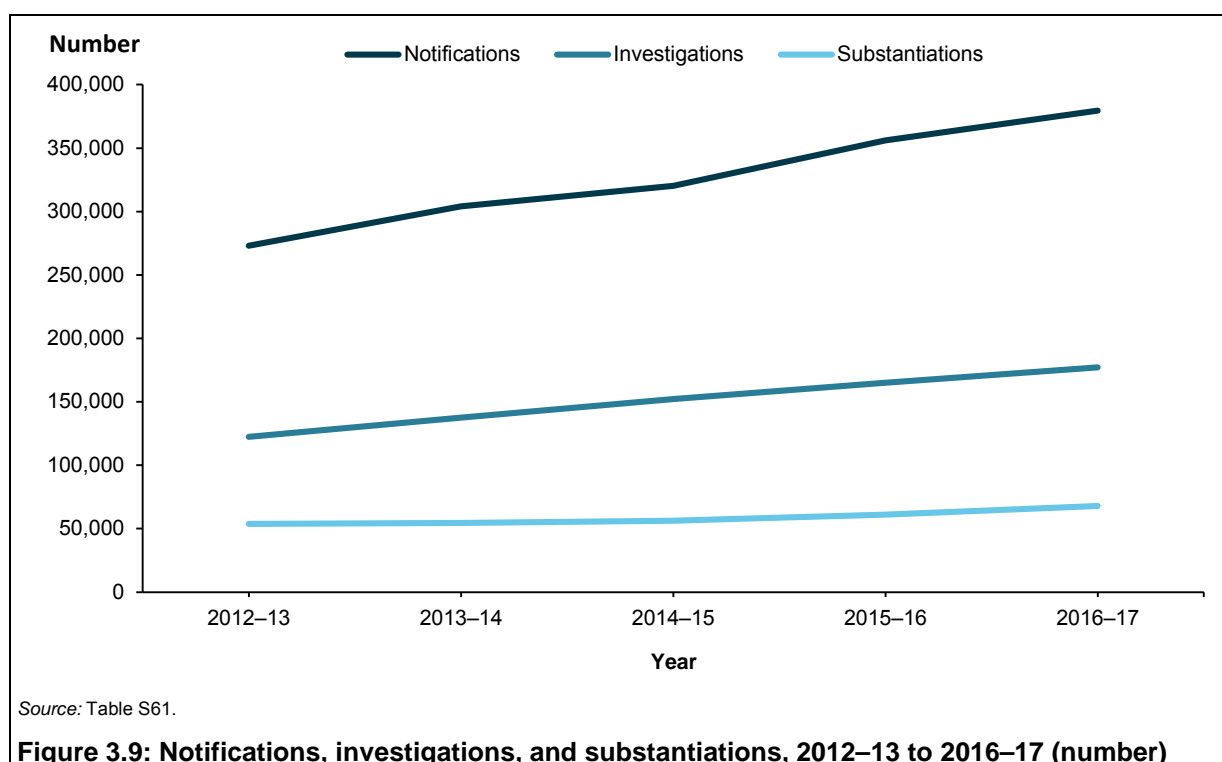
## 3.2 National trends

### Trends in number of cases

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the numbers of notifications, investigations, and substantiations all rose:

- by 39% for notifications (from 272,980 to 379,459)
- by 45% for investigations (from 122,496 to 177,056)
- by 27% for substantiations (from 53,666 to 67,968) (Figure 3.9).

Although, nationally, the number of notifications and substantiations rose over the 5 years, the size and direction of change varied across jurisdictions (tables S15 and S16).



### Trends relating to children

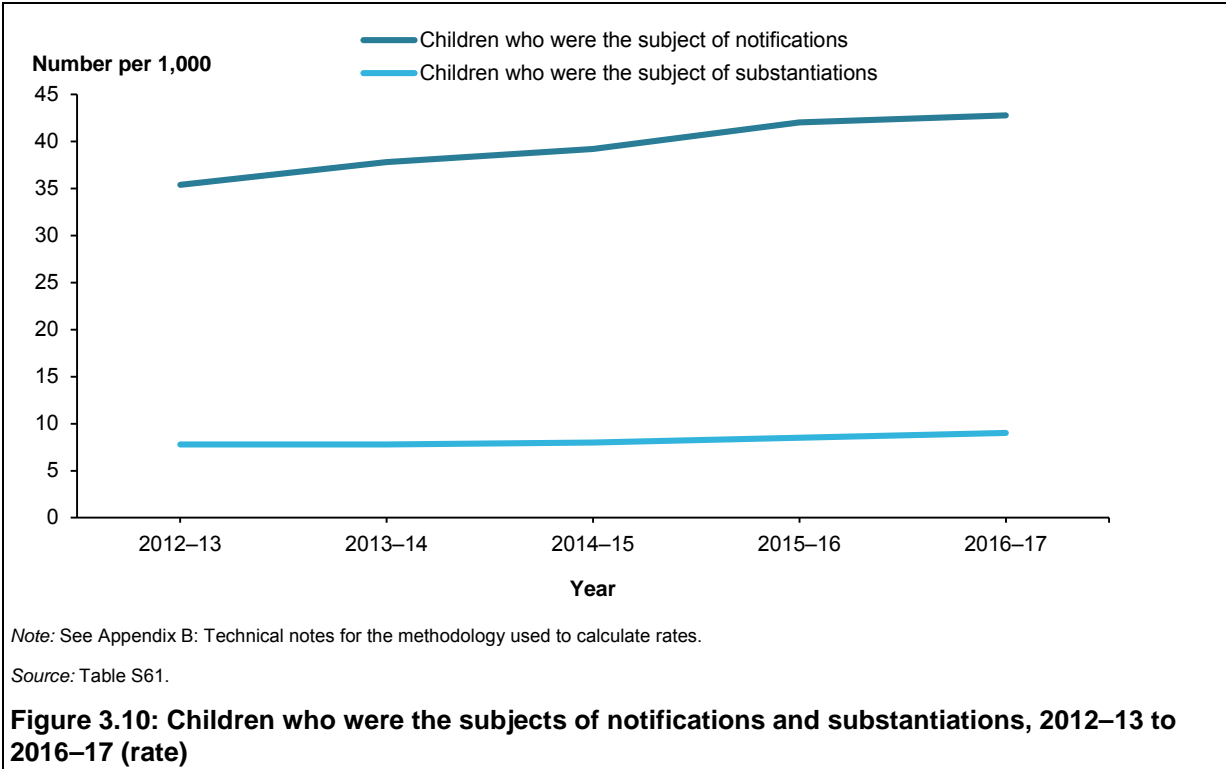
Between 2012–13 and 2016–17:

- the rate of children who were the subjects of notifications rose steadily from 35.4 to 42.8 per 1,000 children (Figure 3.10)
- the number of children with child protection notifications rose by 27%, from 184,216 to 233,795
- the rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations rose from 7.8 to 9.0 per 1,000 children
- the number of children who were the subjects of substantiations rose by 22%, from 40,571 to 49,315 (Table S61).

For state and territory trend data on the number and rate of children who were the subjects of substantiations between 2012–13 and 2016–17, see tables A1 and A2.

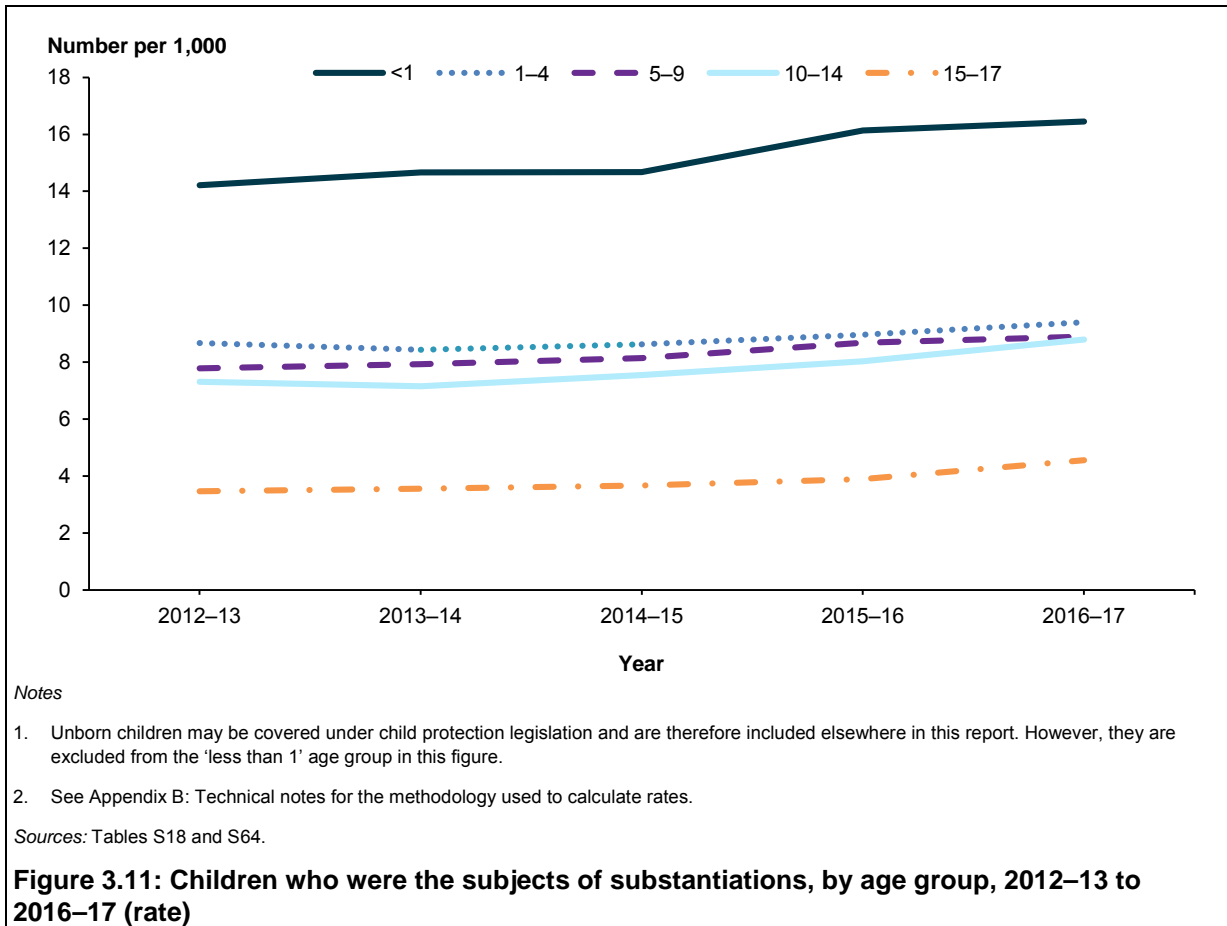
Legislative changes, enhanced public awareness, and inquiries into child protection processes, along with real rises in abuse and neglect, could influence increases in the number of notifications and substantiations, and the children who were the subject of them. Additionally, recent rises could be related to a higher focus on providing statutory responses to those who are most likely to need intervention and protection. This might have resulted in a more targeted approach to investigations, and a rise in the number of children who were the subjects of substantiations.

Information on state and territory policies and practices, and the various inquiries into state and territory child protection services that might have increased public awareness is in Appendixes C–E (online) at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)>.



## Age

Since 2012–13, the rates of children aged less than 1 who were the subjects of substantiations were consistently higher than the rates for any other age group. Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the rate of children aged less than 1 who were the subjects of substantiations rose from 14.2 to 16.4 per 1,000. The rates for other age groups have also risen over the past 5-year period. Between 2015–16 and 2016–17, the rates for all age groups rose, with the greatest increases in those aged 10–14 and 15–17 (Figure 3.11).

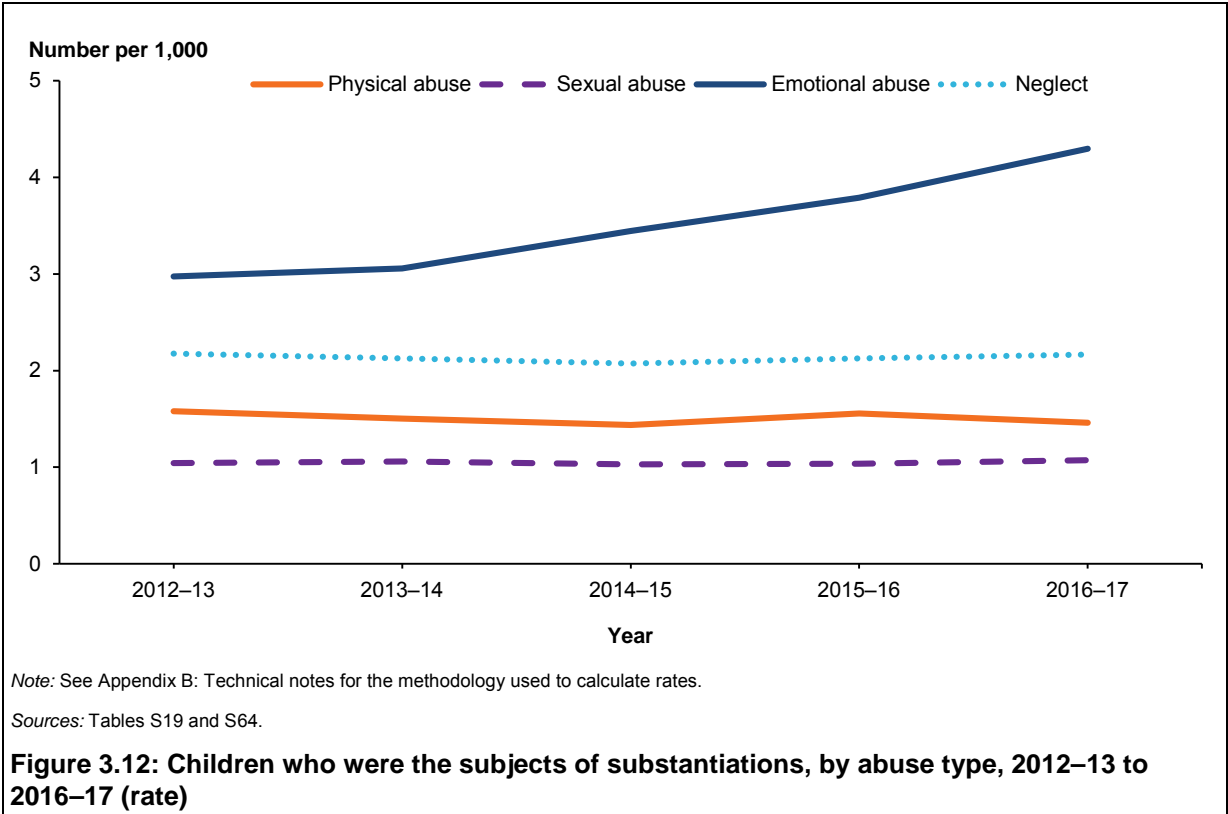




### Abuse and neglect type

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the rates of children who were the subjects of substantiations for emotional abuse were the highest of all types of abuse or neglect, and had the greatest increase of all types of abuse or neglect (from 3.0 to 4.3 per 1,000 children).

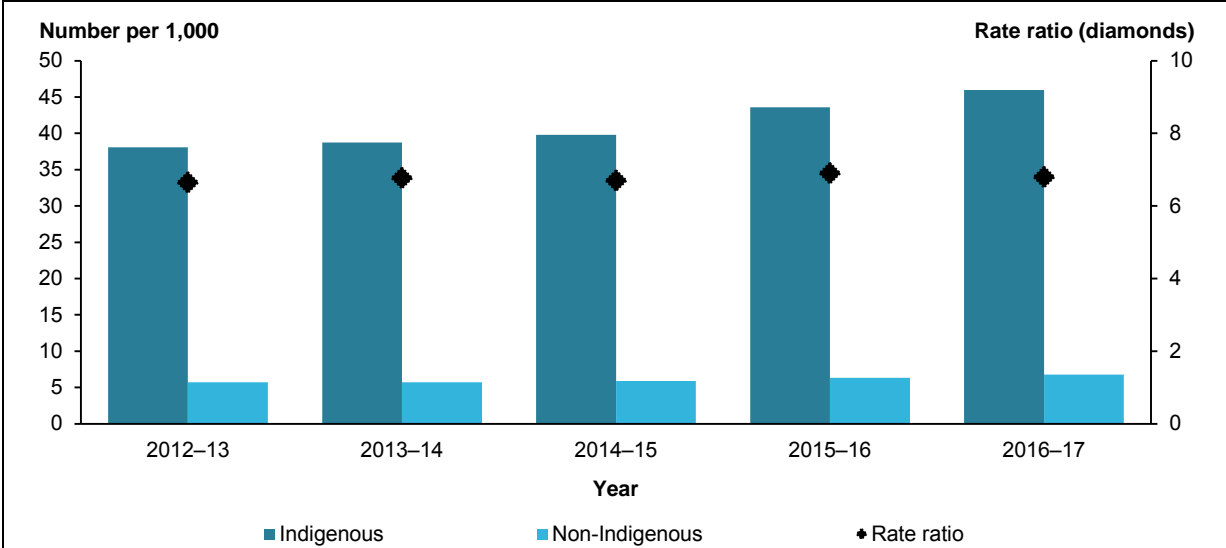
The rates for all other types of abuse and neglect remained fairly stable over the 5 years to 2016–17 (Figure 3.12).



### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the substantiation rates rose from 38.1 to 46.0 per 1,000 for Indigenous children, and from 5.7 to 6.8 per 1,000 for non-Indigenous children.

The rate ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous children remained relatively stable, varying between 6.6 in 2012–13 and 6.8 in 2016–17 (Figure 3.13).



Note: See Appendix B: Technical notes for the methodology used to calculate rates and rate ratios.

Source: Table S62.

**Figure 3.13: Children who were the subjects of substantiations, by Indigenous status, 2012–13 to 2016–17 (rate and rate ratio)**

## 4 Care and protection orders

Care and protection orders are legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare (see Box 4.1 for national categories).

For this report, children are counted only once, even if they were admitted to or discharged from more than 1 order, or were on more than 1 order at 30 June 2017.

If a child was on more than 1 order at 30 June 2017, the child is counted as being on the order that implies the highest level of intervention by the department (with finalised guardianship or custody orders being the most interventionist, and interim and temporary orders the least interventionist).

#### **Box 4.1: National care and protection order types**

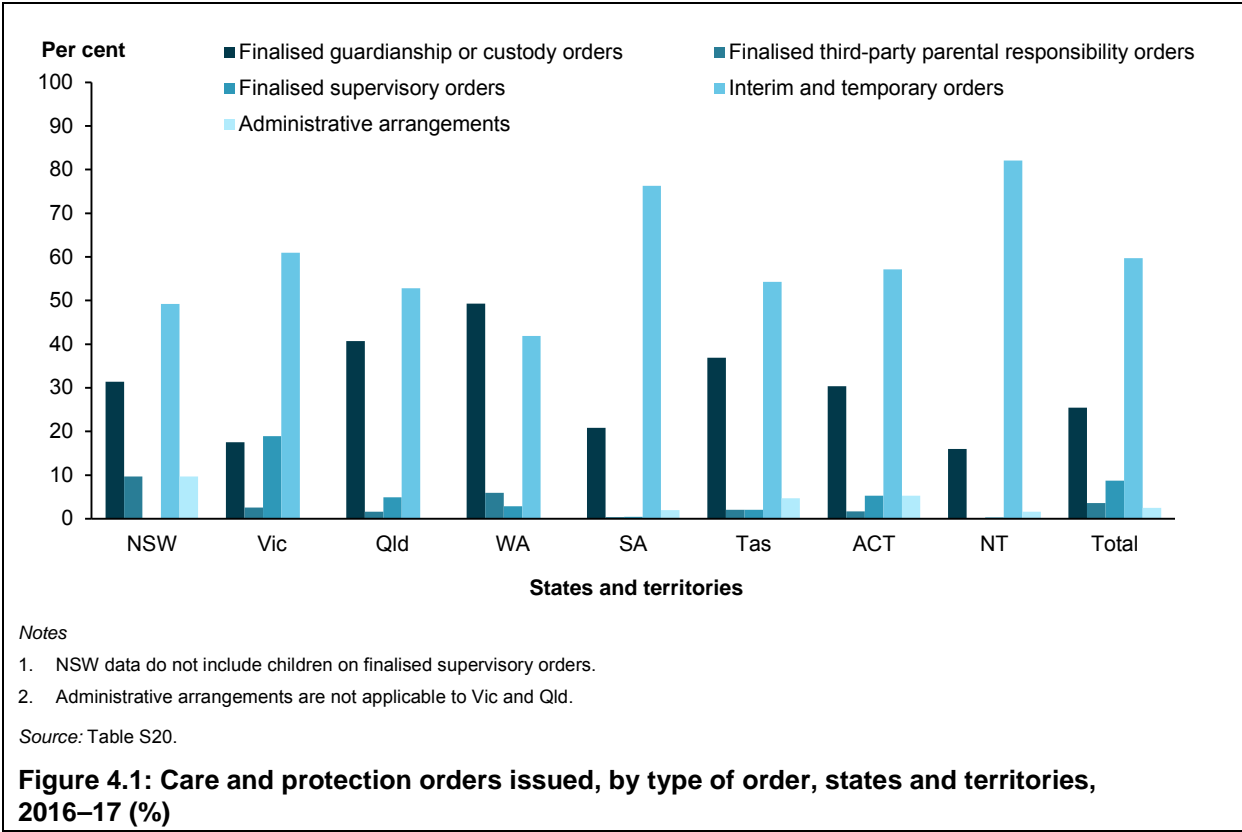
- **Finalised guardianship or custody orders:** Guardianship orders involve the transfer of legal guardianship to the relevant state or territory department or non-government agency. These orders involve considerable intervention in the child's life and that of their family, and are sought only as a last resort.  
Custody orders generally refer to orders that place children in the custody of the state or territory department responsible for child protection or a non-government agency. These orders usually involve the child protection department being responsible for the daily care and requirements of the child, while the parent retains legal guardianship. Finalised guardianship or custody orders can be long-term or short-term. *Long-term orders* transfer guardianship/custody to the nominated person for a specified period greater than 2 years, generally until the child reaches the age of 18. *Short-term orders* transfer guardianship/custody to the nominated person for a specified period of 2 years or less.
- **Finalised third-party parental responsibility:** These orders transfer 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. Finalised third-party parental responsibility orders can be long-term or short-term (see *Long-term orders* and *Short-term orders*).
- **Finalised supervisory orders:** Under these orders, the department supervises and/or directs the level and type of care that is to be provided to the child. Children under supervisory orders are generally under the responsibility of their parents, and the guardianship or custody of the child is unaffected.
- **Interim and temporary orders:** These orders cover the provisions of a limited period of supervision and/or placement of a child. Parental responsibility under these orders may reside with the parents or with the department responsible for child protection.
- **Administrative arrangements:** These are agreements with child protection departments that have the same effect as a court order of transferring custody or guardianship. These arrangements can also allow a child to be placed in out-of-home care without going through the courts.
- **Immigration (guardianship of children) orders:** These are 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 aged under 18 who have entered Australia without a relative to care for them); however, the minister may assign custody of the child to a willing and suitable person in the jurisdiction where a child resides. The assigned person becomes responsible for all matters concerning the child's daily activities, care, and welfare. This category captures the arrangements of these children, who are subsequently placed with carers funded by the departments responsible for child protection.

Children are counted in the state or territory where the order is operative, regardless of where the child is residing. The collection excludes:

- 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 have the effect of transferring custody or guardianship.

# 4.1 Types of orders issued

Of the 45,211 care and protection orders issued in 2016–17, most were interim and temporary orders (60%, or 27,013) or finalised guardianship or custody orders (25%, or 11,501). The types of care and protection orders issued varied across jurisdictions, reflecting the different types of orders available, and the different policies and practices putting them into effect (Figure 4.1).



## 4.2 Children admitted to and discharged from orders

In 2016–17, 12,296 children were admitted to orders, more than three-quarters (78%) of whom were admitted for the first time (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Children admitted to and discharged from care and protection orders, states and territories, 2016–17 (number)**

	NSW <sup>(a)</sup>	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Children admitted to orders	2,822	4,832	1,930	1,169	746	298	188	311	12,296
Children admitted for the first time	2,544	3,561	1,442	710	682	187	171	239	9,536
% of all admissions	90.1	73.7	74.7	60.7	91.4	62.8	91.0	76.8	77.6
Children discharged from orders	2,234	4,353	2,043	1,007	532	225	127	298	10,819

(a) NSW data do not include children on finalised supervisory orders. NSW is working to improve the way it counts admissions to care and protection orders, but currently does not strictly conform to the national counting rules.

### Notes

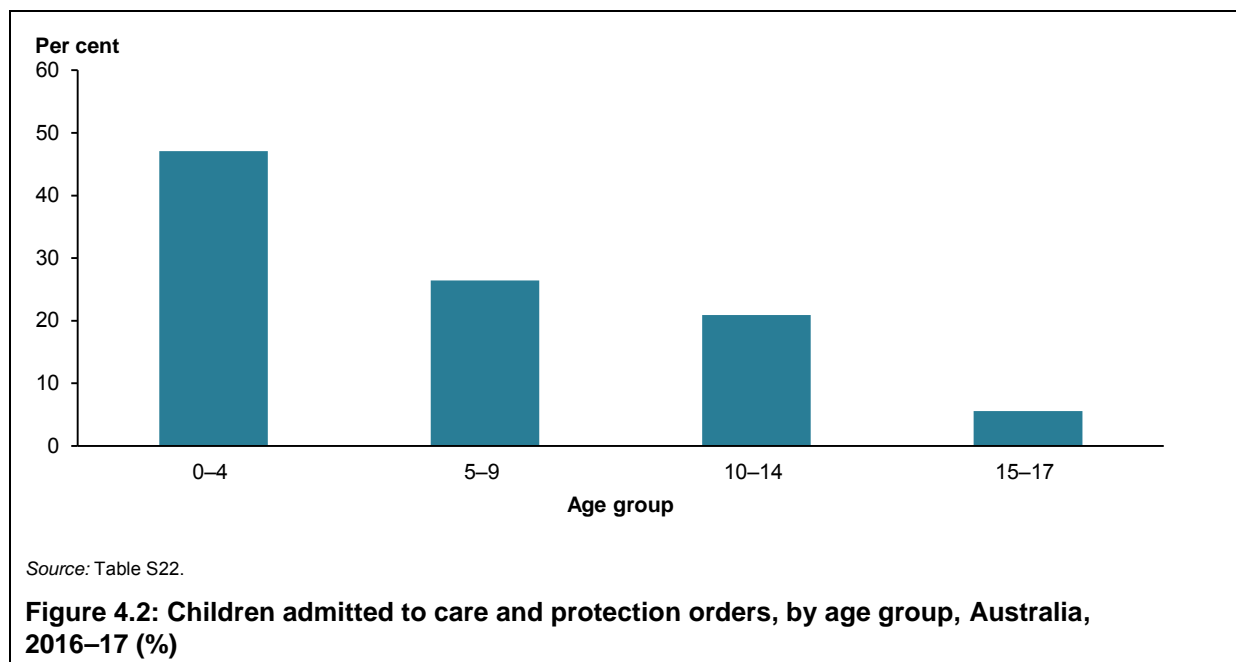
1. Data may include children who were discharged on their 18th birthday.
2. A renewal of an existing order is not counted as an admission. A change to an order is counted as an admission. However, if a new care and protection order is applied in 5 days or less of the discharge of another order (regardless of the type of order), neither an admission nor a discharge are counted.
3. If a child is on multiple care and protection orders/arrangements, all orders/arrangements must be discharged before a discharge for the purposes of this table is counted.
4. If a child is admitted to or discharged from multiple care and protection orders/arrangements, the child is counted for only 1 admission and/or 1 discharge for the year.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017.

Children may be admitted (or re-admitted) to a care and protection order for several 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.

Nationally, the percentage of children who were the subjects of substantiations in 2015–16, and who were subsequently placed on a care and protection order within 12 months, was 30% (Table S21).

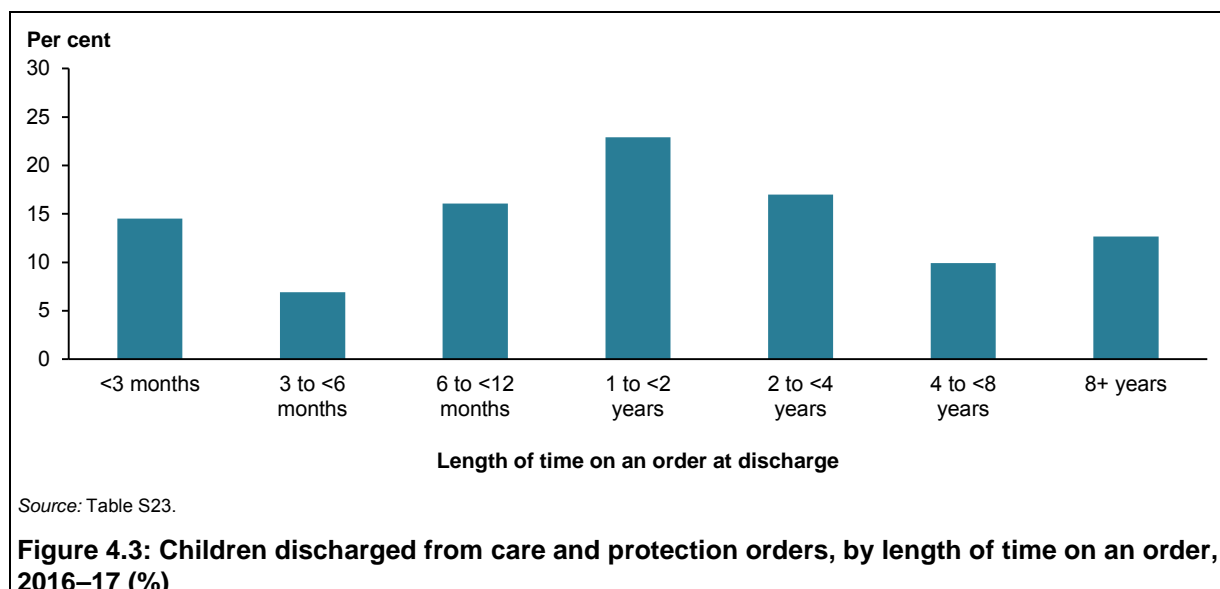
Almost half (47%) of children admitted to orders in 2016–17 were aged 0–4, with a median age of 5 (Figure 4.2). This reflects the view that younger children are considered the most vulnerable. Age patterns were similar to those for substantiations of notifications, with proportions decreasing with increasing age.



### Length of time on an order at discharge

Of the 10,819 children discharged from care and protection orders in 2016–17, the length of time children spend continuously on an order varied. At the time of discharge:

- 15% of children had been on an order continuously for less than 3 months
- 23% of children had been on an order continuously for 1 to less than 2 years
- 13% of children had been on an order continuously for 8 years or more (Figure 4.3).



At the time of discharge, Indigenous children were most likely to have been continuously on an order for 2 to less than 4 years (22%), while non-Indigenous children were most likely to have been continuously on an order for 1 to less than 2 years (24%) (Table S23).

### 4.3 Children on care and protection orders

Nationally, 54,666 children were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2017—a rate of 9.9 per 1,000 children (See Table 4.2 for numbers and rates across jurisdictions).

**Table 4.2: Children on care and protection orders, states and territories, 30 June 2017 (number and rate)**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>	20,453	12,354	9,716	5,138	3,686	1,316	889	1,114	<b>54,666</b>
<b>Number per 1,000</b>	11.8	8.9	8.4	8.7	10.1	11.7	9.7	17.7	<b>9.9</b>

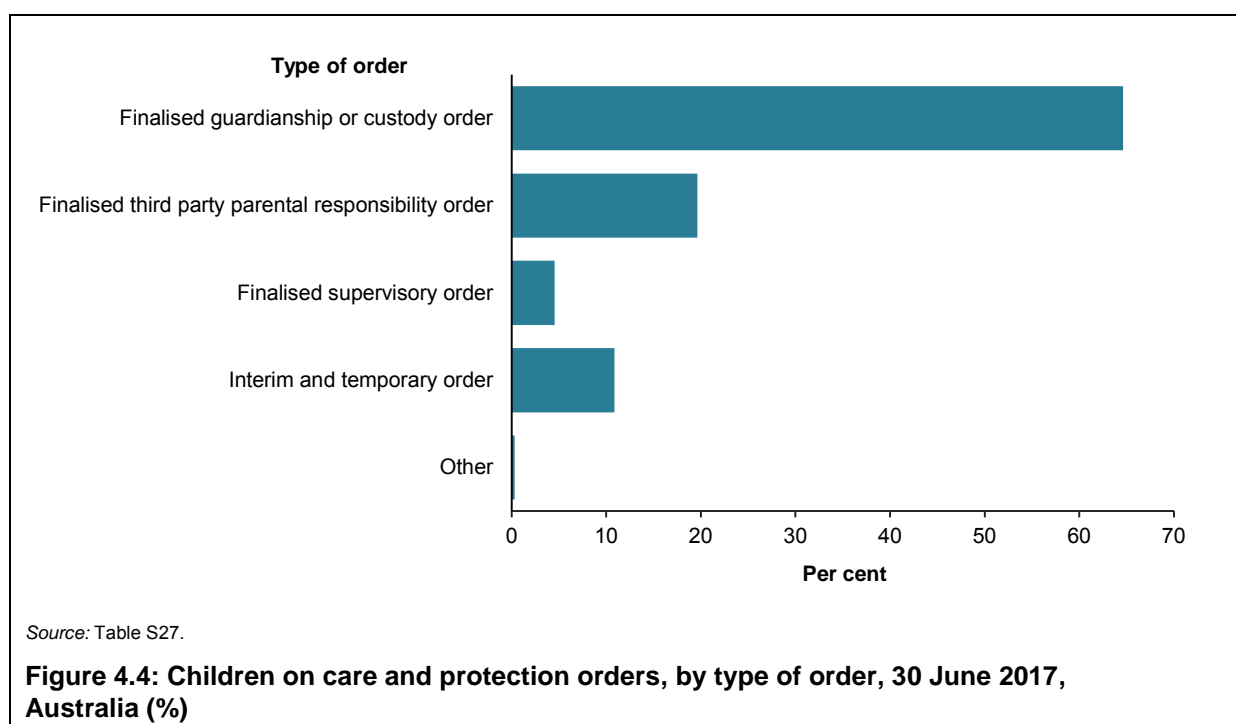
*Notes*

1. NSW data do not include children on finalised supervisory orders.
2. Rates were calculated using preliminary population estimates based on the 2016 Census, and should not be compared with rates calculated using populations or projections based on previous censuses.

Sources: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017; Table S65.

#### Type of order

Of the 54,666 children who were on care and protection orders at 30 June 2017, almost two-thirds (65%, or 35,325) were on finalised guardianship or custody orders (Figure 4.4).

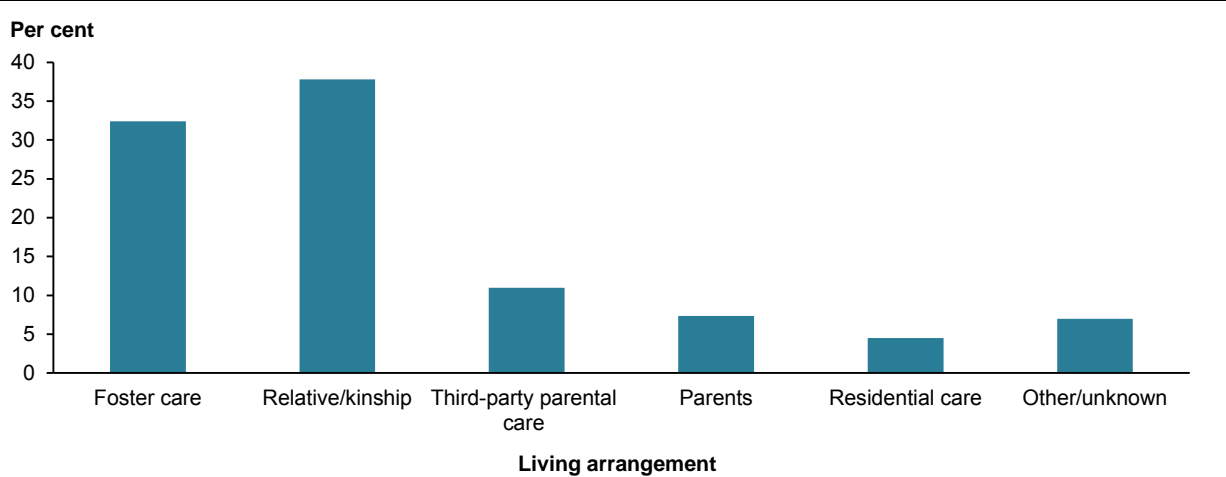




## Living arrangement

At 30 June 2017, the majority of children on care and protection orders lived in funded out-of-home care, either with relative/kinship carers (38%) or in foster care (32%).

A smaller percentage of children on care and protection orders were living in third-party parental care arrangements (11%), with their parents (7%), or in residential care (5%) (Figure 4.5).



Source: Table S24.

**Figure 4.5: Children on care and protection orders, by living arrangement, 30 June 2017, Australia (%)**

The living arrangements of children on care and protection orders generally reflected the expected living arrangements, given the age of the children. Across Australia, 99% of children on orders who were living independently were aged 15–17, and 97% of children on orders who were under 5 were living in family care or home-based care (Table S25).

## Age and sex

Of the 54,666 children on care and protection orders at 30 June 2017:

- 22% were aged under 5 (compared with 47% of children admitted to orders)
- 62% were aged 5–14
- 15% were aged 15–17 (Table S26)
- 51% were boys, and 49% were girls (Table S28).

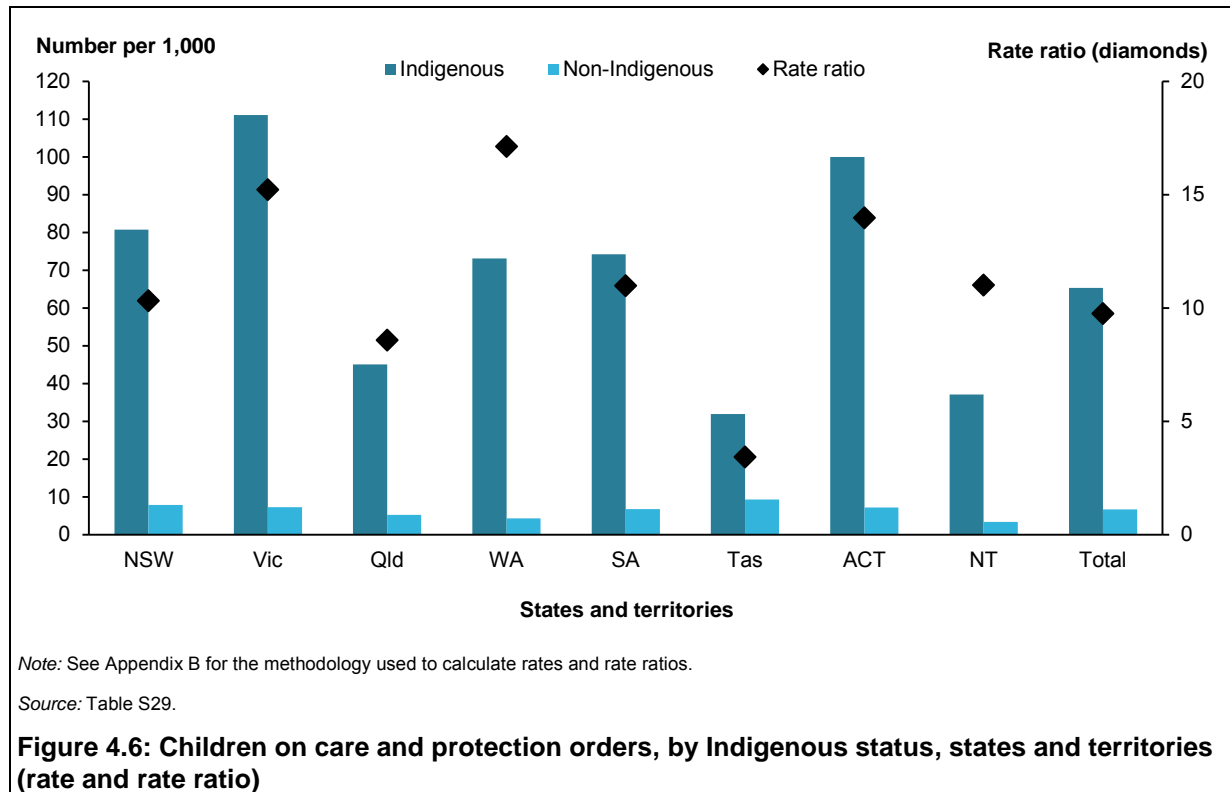
Percentages across age groups were similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, and across jurisdictions (Table S26).

The age distribution of all children on care and protection orders at 30 June 2017 was somewhat older than that for children admitted to orders during 2017. This reflects that the numbers at 30 June include children who were admitted during previous years and remained on an order in 2017 (tables S22 and S26).

Children in all age groups, except those aged less than 1, were more likely to be on a finalised guardianship or custody order—ranging from 64% of children aged 1–4 to 72% of those aged 15–17. But children aged less than 1 were more likely to be on an interim and temporary order (54%) (Table S27).

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2017, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders was almost 10 times that for non-Indigenous children. The rate for Indigenous children was higher in all jurisdictions, with varying rate ratios (Figure 4.6).



At 30 June 2017, Indigenous and non-Indigenous children were generally on similar types of orders, with most on finalised guardianship and custody orders (Table S30). The percentage of Indigenous children on finalised guardianship and custody orders (71%) was higher than that for non-Indigenous children (61%). However, Indigenous children were less likely to be on all other types of orders (Table S30).

## 4.4 National trends

### Children admitted to and discharged from orders

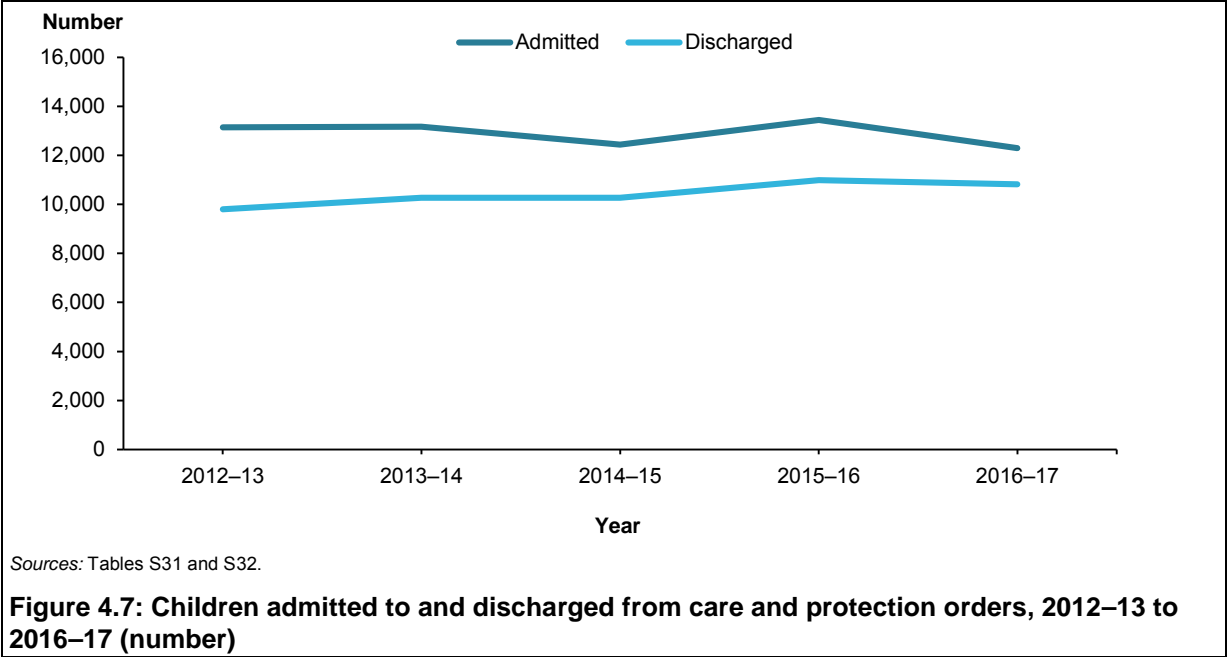
The number of children admitted to orders fluctuated over the 5 years to 2016–17, but decreased overall by 6% (Figure 4.7).

Between 2012–13 and 2014–15, the number of children admitted to orders decreased from 13,146 to 12,437. It then increased by 8% to 13,443 in 2015–16, before decreasing again by 9% to 12,296 in 2016–17 (Table S31).

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the number of children discharged from orders increased by 10%, from 9,795 to 10,819. Despite the overall upward trend, there was a small decrease between 2015–16 and 2016–17, from 10,989 to 10,819 (Table S32).

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the number of children admitted to orders has remained consistently higher than the number discharged (Figure 4.7), though the difference narrowed.

In 2012–13, 3,351 more children were admitted than were discharged, whereas in 2016–17, 1,477 more children were admitted than were discharged (tables S31 and S32).



### Children on care and protection orders

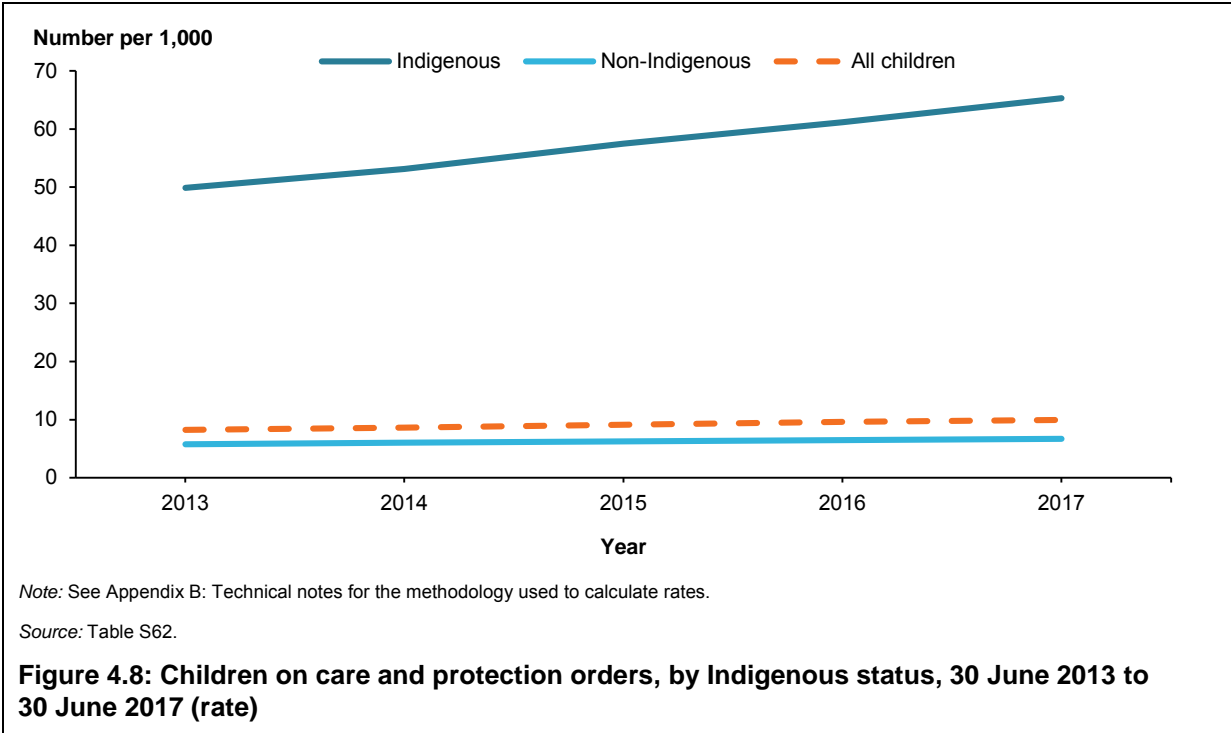
From 30 June 2013 to 30 June 2017, the rate of children aged 0–17 on care and protection orders increased from 8.2 to 9.9 per 1,000 (Table S33).

For state and territory trend data on the number and rate of children on care and protection orders between 30 June 2013 and 30 June 2017, see tables A1 and A2.

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders rose steadily, from 14,455 on 30 June 2013 to 19,662 on 30 June 2017, with rates rising from 49.9 to 65.3 per 1,000.

While the number of non-Indigenous children increased from 28,480 to 34,811 in the same period, the rate remained relatively stable, increasing slightly from 5.8 to 6.7 per 1,000 (Figure 4.8).

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



## 5 Out-of-home care

Out-of-home care is overnight care for children aged 0–17, where the state or territory makes a financial payment or where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer (see Box 5.1 for types of out-of-home care).

Excluded from these counts are placements solely funded by disability services, medical or psychiatric services, juvenile justice facilities, overnight child care services, supported accommodation assistance placements, and children in placements with parents where the jurisdiction makes a financial payment.

### Box 5.1: Types of out-of-home care

- **Residential care:** Placement in a residential building whose purpose is to provide placements for children and where there are paid staff.
- **Family group homes:** Homes for children provided by a department or community-sector agency that have live-in, non-salaried carers, who are reimbursed and/or subsidised for providing care.
- **Home-based care:** Placement in the home of a carer who is reimbursed (or who has been offered but declined reimbursement) for expenses for the care of the child. This is broken down into 4 subcategories: relative/kinship care; foster care; third-party parental care; and other home-based out-of-home care.
- **Independent living:** Includes private board and lead tenant households.
- **Other:** Includes placements that are not otherwise classified, and unknown placement types. These include boarding schools, hospitals, hotels/motels and the defence forces.

Placements for the purpose of respite are included. Respite care is used to provide short-term accommodation for children and young people where the intention is for the child to return to his or her prior place of residence. This includes respite from birth family and respite from placement.

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

Nationally, 11,557 children were admitted to out-of-home care during 2016–2017—a rate of 2.1 per 1,000 children—and 9,854 children were discharged—a rate of 1.8 per 1,000 (tables S34 and S35).

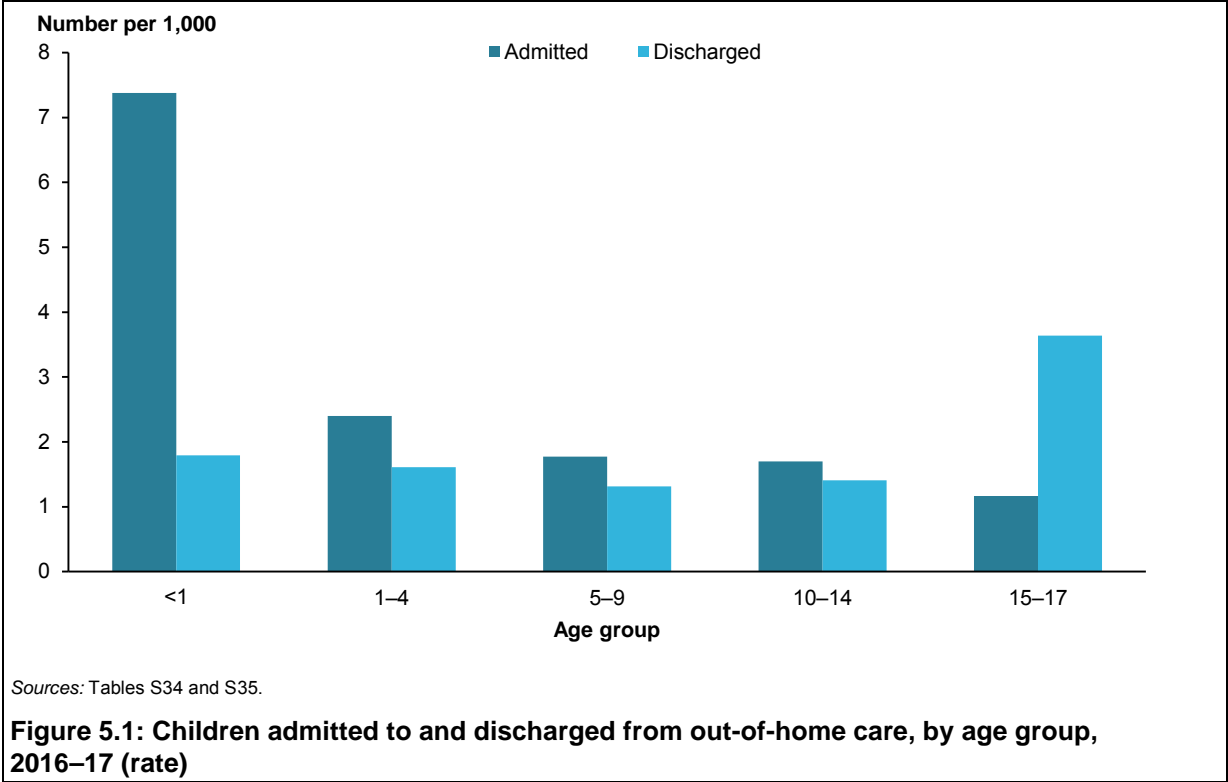
#### Age

The rates of admission to out-of-home care were higher for younger children—for infants (children aged less than 1), the rate was 7.4 per 1,000 children, and for those aged 1–4 it was 2.4 per 1,000 (Figure 5.1). Rates of admission to out-of-home care fell as age increased, with the lowest rate being for children aged 15–17 (1.2 per 1,000). The median age of children admitted to out-of-home care was 6.

The rate of discharges from out-of-home care was highest for children aged 15–17, at 3.6 per 1,000 children. The rates for children discharged from out-of-home care across other age groups were similar, varying from 1.3 per 1,000 for children aged 5–9, to 1.8 per 1,000

for children aged less than 1 (Figure 5.1). The median age of children discharged from out-of-home care was 9.

The different age distribution for admissions and discharges reflects children being admitted to out-of-home care at a younger age, and remaining there for longer, as well as children leaving out-of-home care once they turn 18.



### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Overall, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (13.6 per 1,000) were 10 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be admitted to out-of-home care during 2016–17 (1.4 per 1,000).

Indigenous children were more likely to be admitted to out-of-home across all age groups. During 2016–17, Indigenous children aged under than 10 were 10 times as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to be admitted, while those aged 10–14 or 15–17 were 8 times as likely (Table S34).

Rates of discharges from out-of-home care during 2016–17 were also higher for Indigenous children (11.2 per 1,000 children) than non-Indigenous children (1.2 per 1,000).

Indigenous children aged less than 1 were 7 times as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to be discharged from out-of-home care, and Indigenous children aged 10–14 were 11 times as likely as non-Indigenous children of the same age to have been discharged from out-of-home care (Table S35).

# 5.2 Children in out-of-home care

Nationally, 47,915 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017—a rate of 8.7 per 1,000 children (see Table 5.1 for numbers and rates across jurisdictions).

**Table 5.1: Children in out-of-home care, states and territories, 30 June 2017 (number and rate)**

	NSW <sup>(a)</sup>	Vic	Qld	WA <sup>(b)</sup>	SA	Tas <sup>(c)</sup>	ACT <sup>(d)</sup>	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>	17,879	10,312	8,941	4,232	3,484	1,205	803	1,059	<b>47,915</b>
<b>Number per 1,000</b>	10.3	7.5	7.8	7.1	9.5	10.7	8.8	16.8	<b>8.7</b>

- (a) NSW data exclude children and young people on 'Guardianship Orders' (finalised third-party parental responsibility orders: non out-of-home care funded).
- (b) WA data exclude children on third-party parental responsibility orders and from 2015–16 includes children placed in boarding schools.
- (c) Tas 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.
- (d) Out-of-home care data for the ACT includes some young people 18 years and over whose carers receive a full carer payment. This is generally to facilitate completion of schooling without change to the placement.

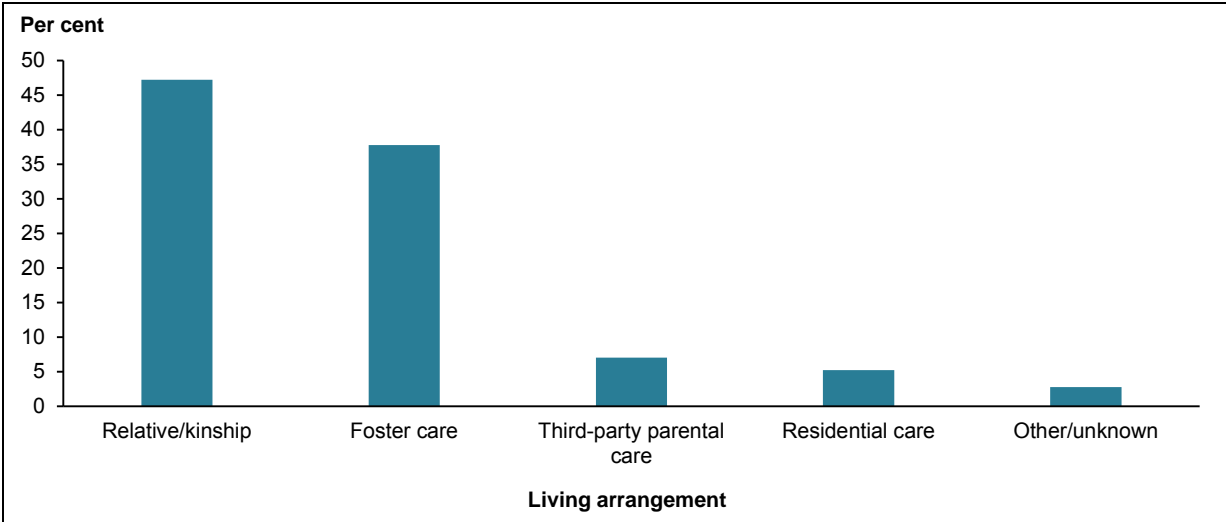
*Note:* Rates were calculated using preliminary population estimates based on the 2016 Census and should not be compared with rates calculated using populations or projections based on previous Censuses.

*Sources:* AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017; Table S65.

## Types of placement

The vast majority of children (93%) in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017 were in home-based care—47% in relative/kinship care, 38% in foster care, 7% in third-party parental care, and 1% in other types of home-based care (Figure 5.2).

About 1 in 20 children in out-of-home care were living in residential care. Residential care is mainly used 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.



*Source:* Table S36.

**Figure 5.2: Children in out-of-home care, by living arrangements, Australia, 30 June 2017 (%)**

Box 5.2 describes recent development work undertaken to enable the relationship between children and their relative/kin carer to be reported.

### **Box 5.2: Preliminary analysis of relationship between relative/kin carer and child**

In 2016–17, data on the relationship of relative/kin carers were only available for 5 jurisdictions, representing 36% of children placed with relative/kin carers at 30 June 2017. However, these data provide some insight into the main types of relative/kin carers utilised for such placements.

In the jurisdictions with available data, the majority of children in relative/kinship care at 30 June 2017 were placed with grandparents (52%), 20% were placed with an aunt/uncle, and 17% in a non-familial relationship (Table S37).

## **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 (31%) (Table S38). The median age of children in out-of-home care was 9. Just over half (52%) of all children in out-of-home care were boys (Table S39).

Across age groups, living arrangements for children in out-of-home care were similar to those for children on care and protection orders.

Children in residential care were older than children in home-based care—85% of children in residential care or family group homes were aged 10 and over, with a median age of 14. The corresponding percentage of children aged 10 and over in home-based care was 44% (Table S40), with a median age of 9.

Only 3% of children in residential care or family group homes were aged under 5, compared with 24% of children in home-based care.

## **Disability**

Data on disability are not currently uniformly captured in jurisdictional client data. But given the important overlaps between disability and child protection services, preliminary data on the disability status of children in out-of-home care are presented for the first time in Box 5.3.

### **Box 5.3: Preliminary analysis of disability status of children in out-of-home care**

Disability is an umbrella term for any or all of: an impairment of body structure or function; a limitation in activities; or a restriction in participation. 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). To date national data on children in out-of-home care with a disability has been sparse.

Disability status was identified in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children second action plan (FaHCSIA 2012) as a disaggregation of interest for child protection indicator reporting, and continues to be an area of interest under the third action plan (DSS 2015b).

In 2016–17, data on the disability status of children in out-of-home care were available for 6 jurisdictions, representing 71% of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017. Overall 15% of children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017 were reported as having a disability (Table S41). As disability is a multidimensional and complex concept, differences may exist across jurisdictions in how disability is defined, including which health conditions are classified as a disability. There are also differences in how information about disability is captured in jurisdictional processes and client information systems.



## Remoteness area

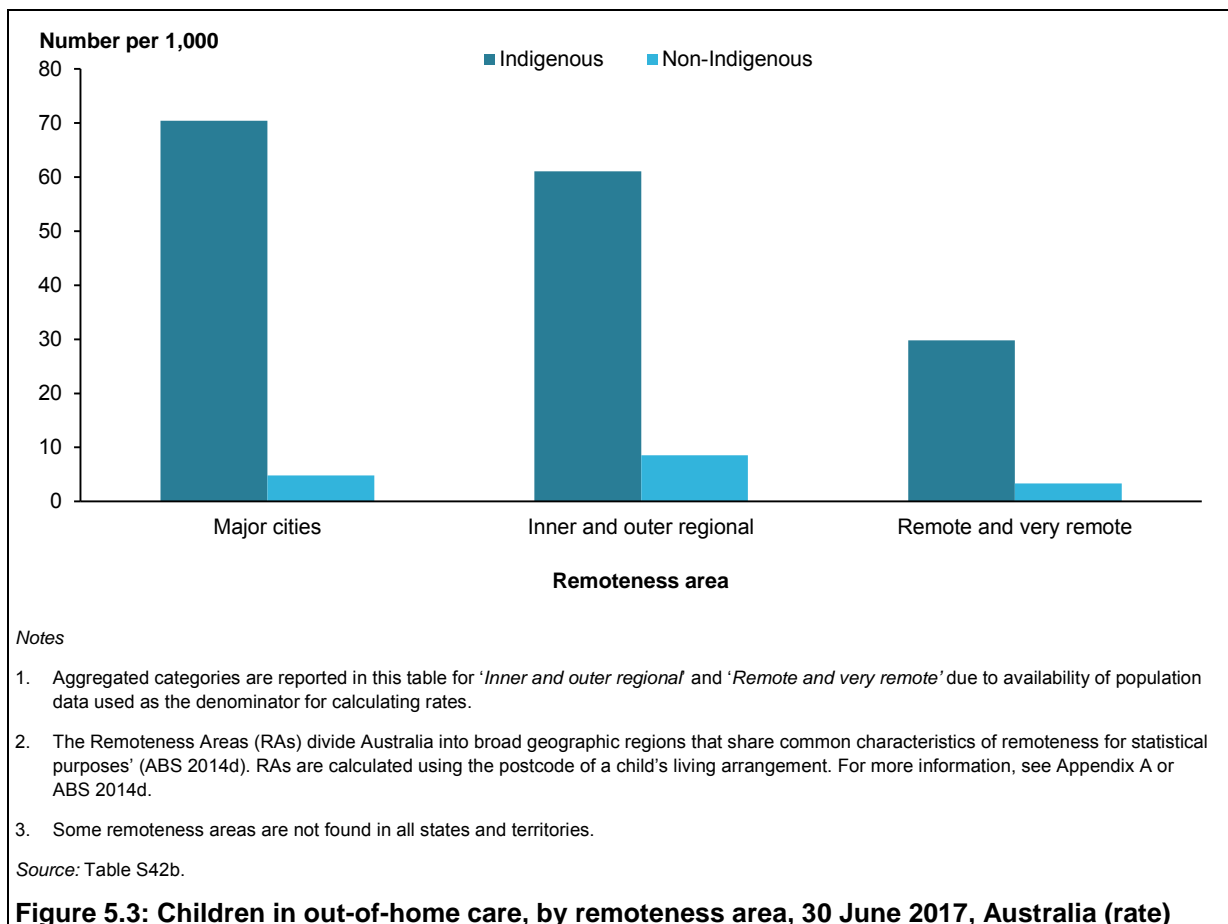
On 30 June 2017, more than half (53%) of the children in out-of-home care lived in *Major cities*, and two-fifths (43%) lived in *Inner regional* and *Outer regional* areas (based on postcode of living arrangement) (Table S42a).

Children living in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were twice as likely as those in *Major cities* to be in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017.

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 5.3).

Indigenous children living in *Major cities* were 15 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care at 30 June—70.4 per 1,000 children compared with 4.8 per 1,000 (Table S42b).

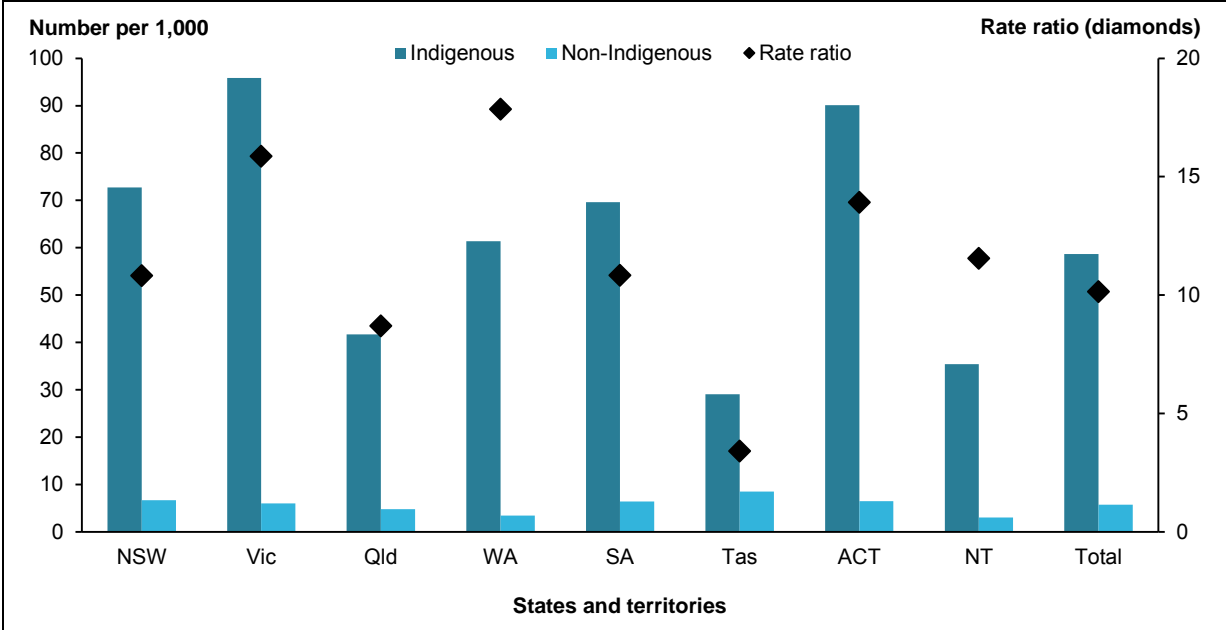
Indigenous children living in *Remote* and *Very remote* areas were 9 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care.



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

At 30 June 2017, 17,664 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care—a rate of 58.7 per 1,000 children, which was 10 times the rate for non-Indigenous children. In all jurisdictions, the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was much higher than that for non-Indigenous children (Figure 5.4).

Indigenous children in out-of-home care were over-represented across all age groups, but particularly for those aged 5–9 who were 12 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017 (Table S44).



Note: See Appendix B: Technical notes for the methodology used to calculate rate and rate ratios.

Source: Table S43.

**Figure 5.4: Children in out-of-home care, by Indigenous status, states and territories (rate and rate ratio)**

Box 5.4 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 proportions of Indigenous children who were placed either with Indigenous caregivers or with relatives in many jurisdictions (Figure 5.5).

Across Australia, in 2016–17, 68% of Indigenous children were placed with relatives/kin, with other Indigenous caregivers, or in Indigenous residential care—this percentage is similar to that reported in previous years.

#### **Box 5.4: 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.

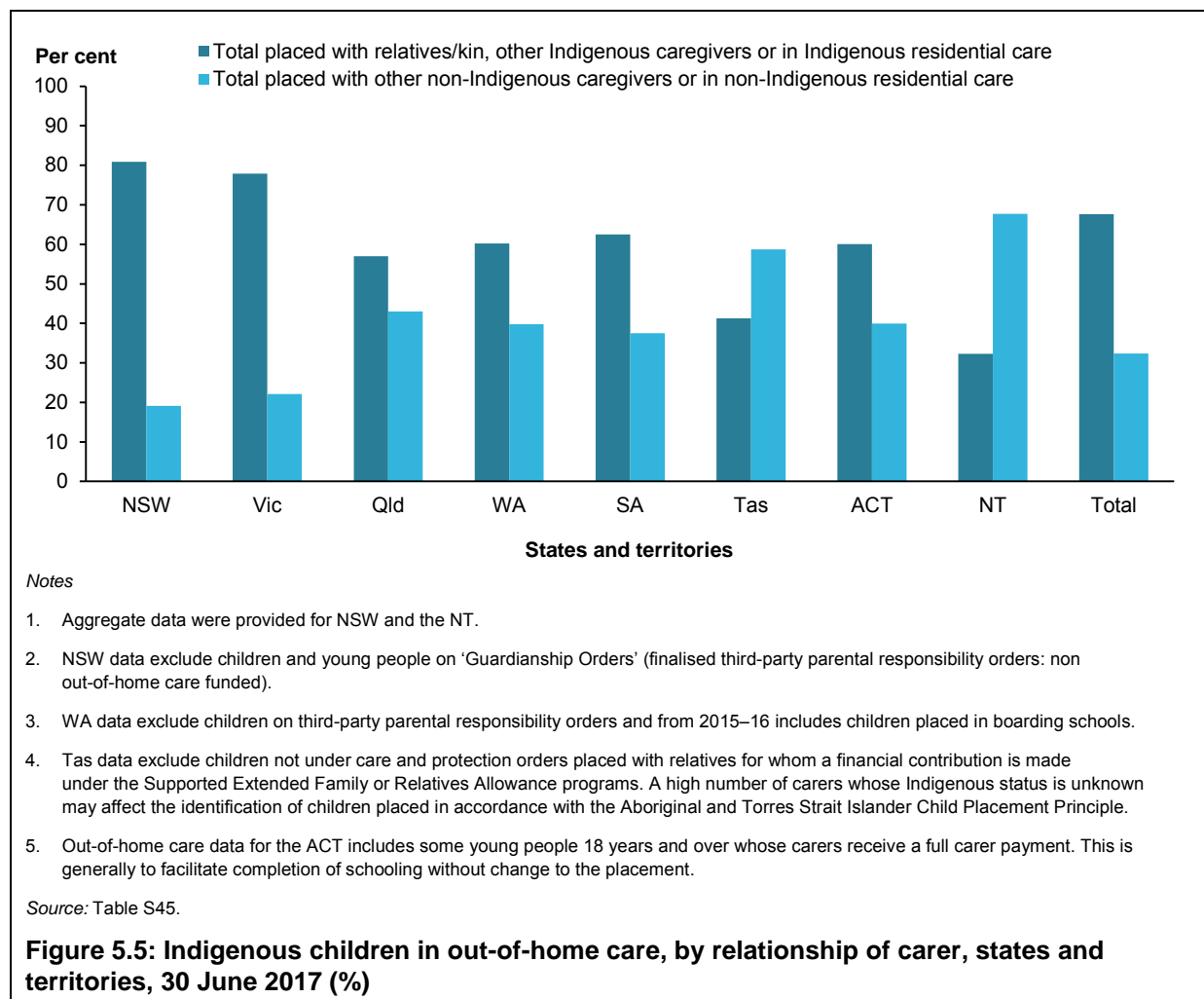
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle outlines a preference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be placed with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they are placed outside their family (Lock 1997; Tilbury et al. 2013).

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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 Placement Principle, and highlighted the need to improve adherence to all 5 elements and monitoring of this.



## Care and protection order status

Nationally:

- 95% of children in out-of-home care were also on care and protection orders
- less than 1% were on another type of order
- 5% were not on an order (Table S46).

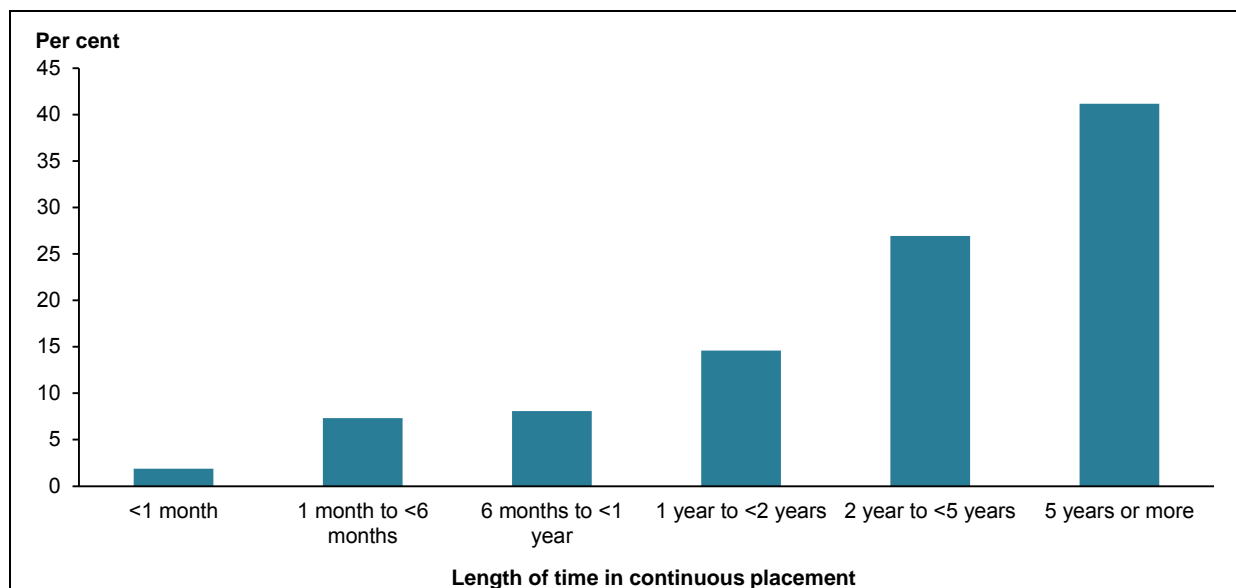
## Length of time continuously in care

Of the 47,915 children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017, most (83%) had been continuously in out-of-home care for 1 year or more (Table S47). This included:

- 27% who had been in out-of-home care for 2–5 years
- 41% who had been in out-of-home care for 5 years or more (Figure 5.6).

About 17% of children had been in out-of-home care for less than 1 year.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous children spent similar timeframes in out-of-home care, with about 83% in both groups spending 1 year or more continuously in care, and 17% spending less than 1 year continuously in care.



Source: Table S47.

**Figure 5.6: Children in out-of-home care, by length of time continuously in care, 30 June 2017 (%)**

## Long-term alternative care

Reunification (or safe return home) is the policy priority for children in out-of-home care across all states and territories. However, reunification is not achieved for some children, and alternative permanent care arrangements are needed (see Box 5.5).

National data are not currently available on the number of children who exited out-of-home care, and were reunited with their parents. However, work is being done to future reporting. Policies for permanency planning show that children who have been in care for 2 or more years need a decision on their long-term care arrangements (AIHW 2016b).

### Box 5.5: Permanency planning and alternative care arrangements

Permanency planning refers to the processes undertaken by state and territory departments responsible for child protection to achieve a stable long-term care arrangement.

The actions taken to achieve long-term care arrangements can be broadly grouped as reunification, third-party parental responsibility orders, long-term finalised guardianship/custody orders, and adoption. Box 4.1 provides information on third-party parental responsibility orders and guardianship/custody orders.

#### Reunification

Reunification is a planned process to safely return a child home after a period of time in care to be with their birth parent(s), family, or former guardian (and enabling a child to stay). This occurs when it is in the child's best interests, and where it will safeguard their long-term stability and permanency (AIHW 2016b).

By returning to the family of origin, the child may be deemed to have exited care. Parental rights and responsibilities may resume as normal, although, in some cases, a care and protection order can remain in place for a period of time.

*(continued)*

### Box 5.5 (continued): Permanency planning and alternative care arrangements

### Known carer adoption

Known carer adoption is adoption by the foster parent(s) or other non-relative(s) who has been caring for a child in out-of-home care, and been responsible for the daily care and control of the child for the period specified by the relevant state/territory department before the adoption (AIHW 2017a). In some jurisdictions, adoption from care may not be viewed as part of permanency planning, or, while it is legally available, might be rarely used in practice—in particular for Indigenous children and young people.

## Children remaining in out-of-home care

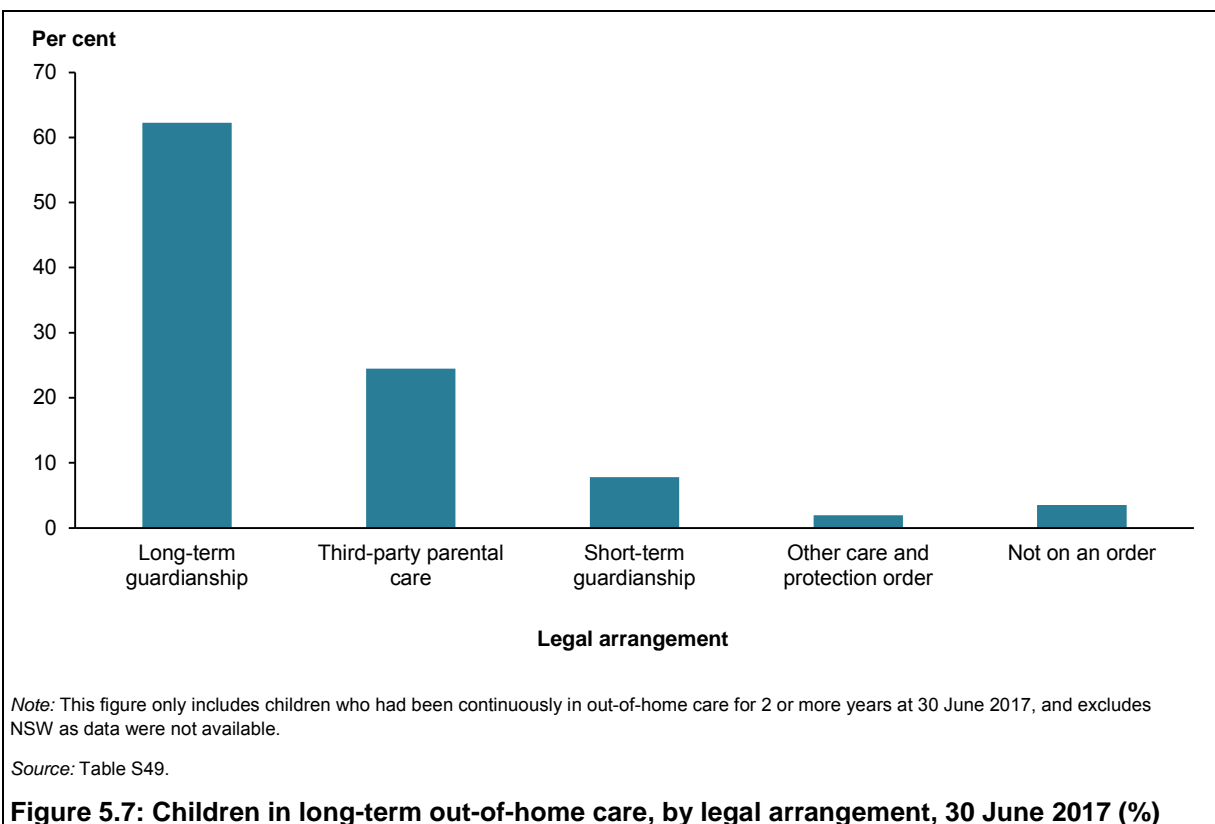
### Age and Indigenous status

At 30 June 2017, 68% (32,638) of the 47,915 children in out-of-home care had been in 'long-term care'; that is, for 2 or more years (Table S47).

Almost three-quarters (71%) were aged between 5 and 14, with a median age of 10, and more than one-third (37%) were Indigenous (Table S48).

### Legal arrangement

Most (87%) children who had been in care for 2 or more years were on a long-term care and protection order (Figure 5.7). Nearly one-quarter (24%) of the children were in a third-party parental care arrangement—home-based care where parental responsibility had been transferred to the carer. About 3 in 5 (62%) were on long-term finalised guardianship or custody orders.



When compared with non-Indigenous children, Indigenous children were:

- more likely to be on long-term guardianship/custody orders (71% compared with 57%)
- less likely to be in long-term third-party care arrangements (13% compared with 31%) (Table S49).

These findings may reflect a difference in the way permanency for Indigenous children is achieved. Permanency for Indigenous children does not rely on individual relationships, but is about belonging to and being cared for in extended family and kin networks. As a result, placement with family and community should be considered before other permanent/care arrangements (SNAICC 2016).

Most (89%) children on a long-term guardianship or custody order were living in home-based care with a foster or relative/kinship carer, while 8% were living in residential care or family group homes (Table S49).

Similar patterns were generally seen across age groups, though children aged 2–4 were less likely to be on a long-term third-party parental responsibility order, and more likely to be on short-term guardianship/custody orders than older children. Young people aged 15–17 were more likely to be on a long-term guardianship order and living in residential care than other children (Table S50).

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). As noted in Section 5.2, residential care may be used for children who have complex needs or to keep large sibling groups together.

### Children adopted from out-of-home care

An alternative arrangement that may be used to achieve permanency for children in out-of-home care is adoption—specifically, known carer adoption (see Box 5.5).

In 2016–17, 143 known carer adoption orders were finalised in Australia (AIHW 2017a). Australian jurisdictions differ in the extent to which they use adoption to improve permanency for children in out-of-home care (AIHW 2016b). The majority of carer adoptions were finalised in New South Wales, reflecting that state’s policies in regard to options used for achieving stability for children in need of long-term care and protection where restoration to family was not appropriate (AIHW 2017a).

## 5.3 National trends

### Children admitted to out-of-home care

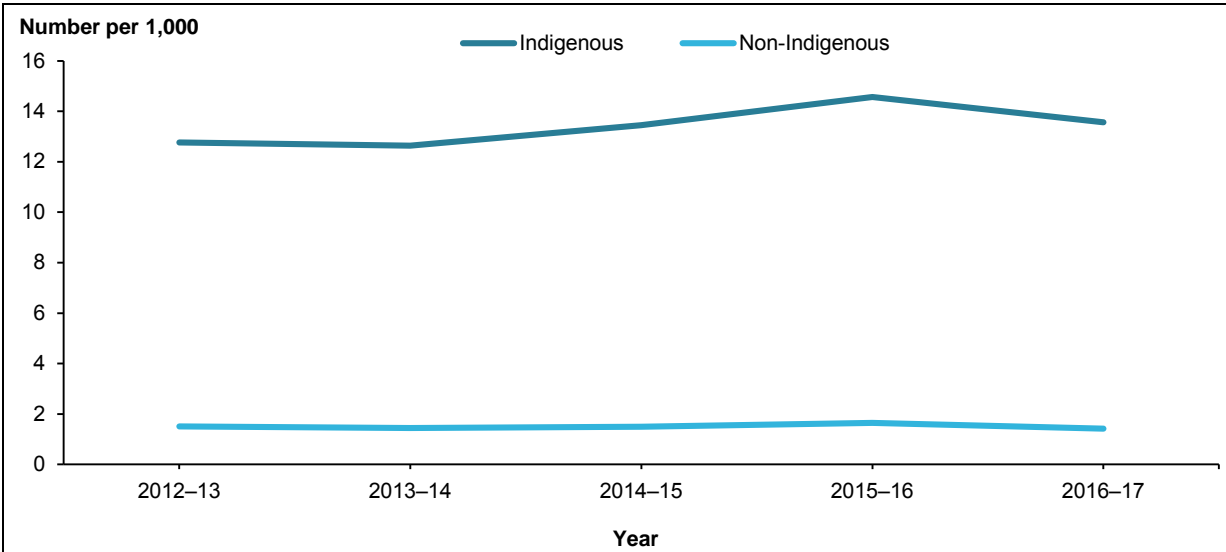
Over the 5-year period from 2012–13 to 2016–17, the number of children admitted to out-of-home care rose by 2% (from 11,341 to 11,557), however the numbers fluctuated over this time.

Over the most recent year, the number of children admitted fell by about 10% (from 12,829 in 2015–16 to 11,557 in 2016–17 (Table S51). The overall rate of admissions remained stable over the same 5 years at about 2.0 per 1,000 children.

The number of admissions has consistently outnumbered discharges—in 2016–17, 1,703 more children were admitted than were discharged (tables S51 and S53).

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were over-represented in admissions to out-of-home care. Between 2012–13 and 2015–16, the rate of Indigenous children admitted to out-of-home care rose from 12.8 to 14.6 per 1,000, then fell to 13.6 per 1,000 in 2016–17 (Figure 5.8). For non-Indigenous children, the rate remained stable over the 5-year period, at about 1.5 per 1,000.



Source: Table S51.

**Figure 5.8: Children admitted to out-of-home care, by Indigenous status, Australia, 2012–13 to 2016–17 (rate)**

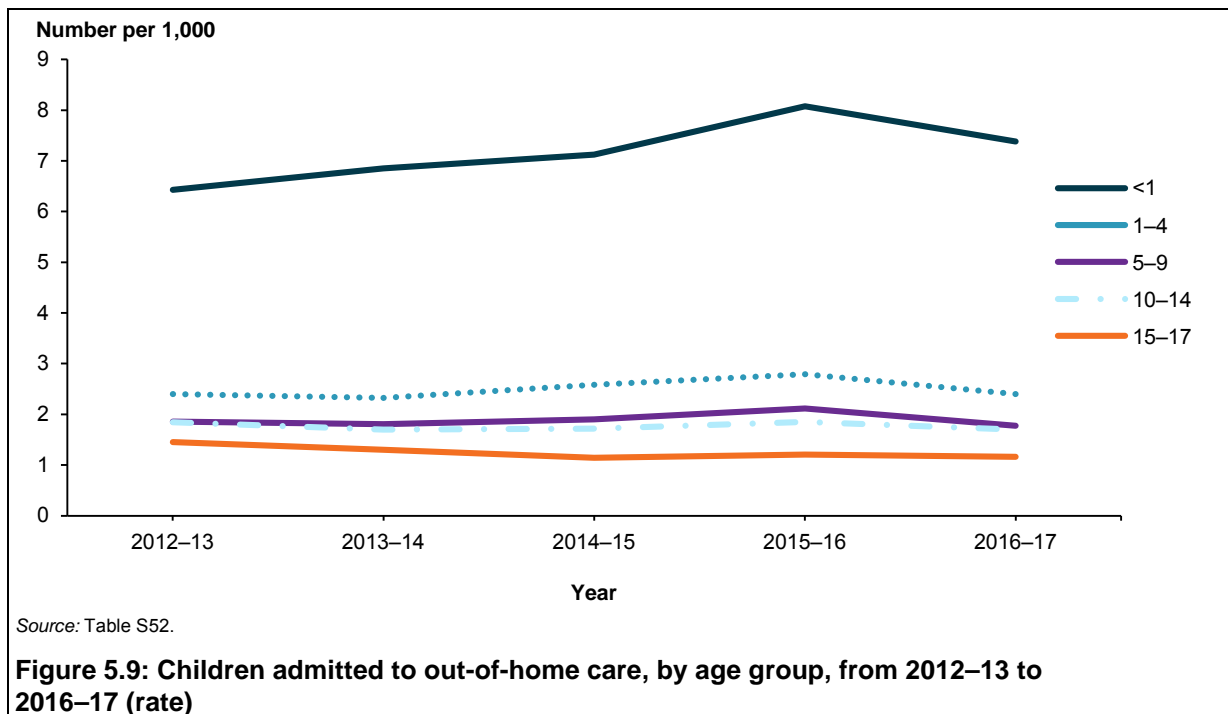


## Age

Since 2012–13, the rates of admission to out-of-home care for infants (children aged less than 1) were consistently higher than the rates for any other age group (Figure 5.9).

For these children, the rate of admission rose from 6.4 per 1,000 in 2012–13 to 8.1 per 1,000 in 2015–16, then fell to 7.4 per 1,000 in 2016–17.

The rates for the other age groups were more stable over the 5-year period, with a slight peak observed across age groups during 2015–16.



## Children discharged from out-of-home care

Between 2012–13 and 2013–14, the number of children discharged from out-of-home care fell by 10%—from 9,360 in to 8,410 (Table S53). The number then rose substantially in 2014–15 to 11,146, which was largely due to legislative reforms in New South Wales. In 2015–16 and 2016–17, the number of children discharged has returned to levels similar to 2012–13, at about 9,800 for each year.

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the rate of children discharged (excluding the spike in 2014–15) was stable, at about 1.8 per 1,000 children.

For Indigenous children, the rate rose from 9.2 per 1,000 in 2012–13 to 11.2 per 1,000 in 2016–17, whereas the rate for non-Indigenous children was relatively stable, at about 1.3 per 1,000 (Table S53).

Between 2012–13 and 2016–17, the rates of children aged 15–17 discharged from out-of-home care were consistently higher than the rates for any other age group (Table S54). The rates of discharges for children aged 15–17 was relatively stable at about 3.7 per 1,000 children, while for the other age groups, it ranged from about 1.3 per 1,000 for children aged 5–9, to 1.7 per 1,000 for infants (children aged less than 1).

## Children in out-of-home care

Nationally, the rate of children in out-of-home care at 30 June rose, from 7.7 per 1,000 in 2013 to 8.7 per 1,000 in 2017 (Figure 5.10; Table S55).

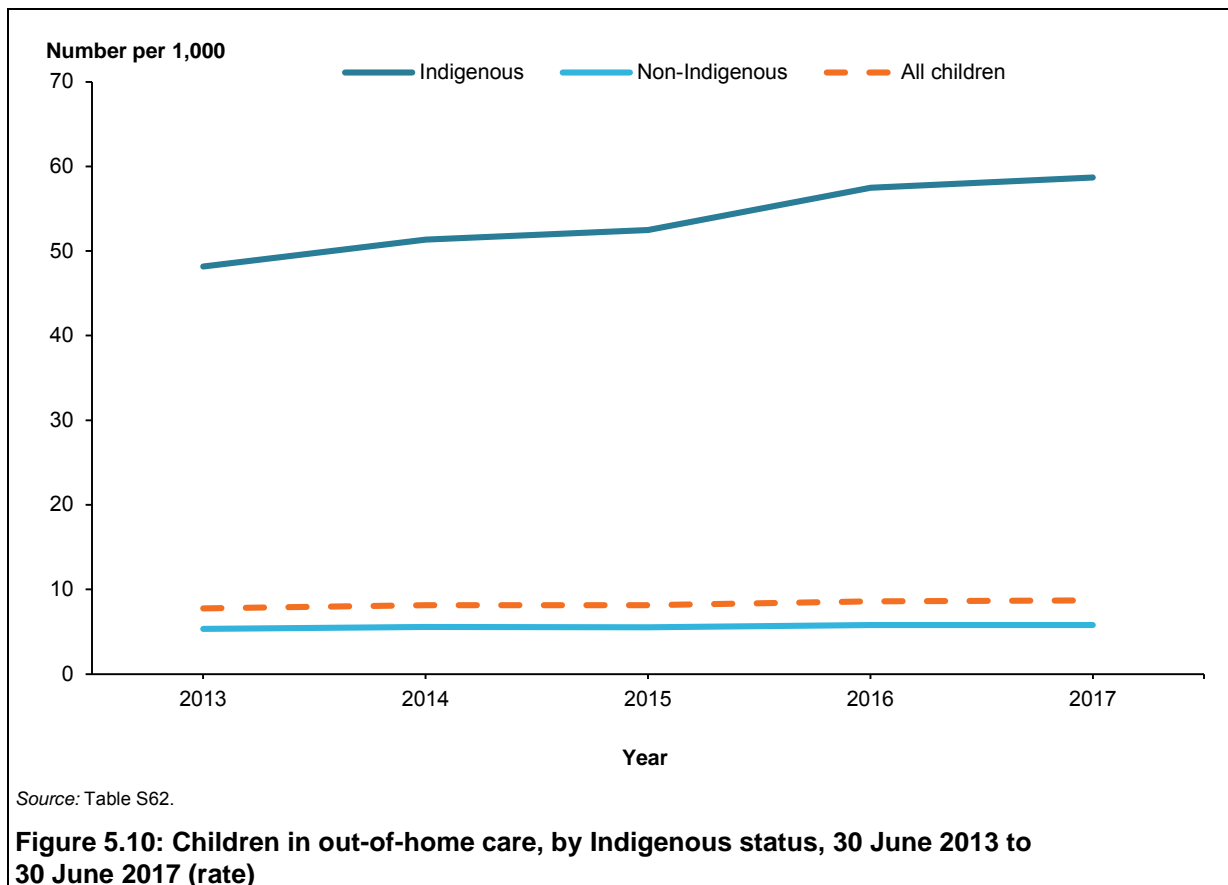
Overall, 7,366 more children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017 compared with 30 June 2013, an 18% rise.

For state and territory trend data on the number and rate of children on out-of-home care between 30 June 2013 and 30 June 2017, see tables A1 and A2.

Increases in the rate of children in out-of-home care might reflect the cumulative impact of children being admitted to and remaining in out-of-home care. This is reflected in the high proportion of children who were in care for 5 or more years between 2012 and 2017 (Table S56).

The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed in out-of-home care rose steadily, from 48.2 per 1,000 children in 2013 to 58.7 per 1,000 children in 2017, while the rate for non-Indigenous children rose slightly, from 5.3 to 5.8 (Figure 5.10).

As with the rate of children on care and protection orders (see Chapter 4), the steady rise in the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care has largely driven the rise in the overall rate of children in out-of-home care.



## 6 Carers

Carers are individuals who have undergone screening and received authorisation to provide placements in their private households for children in funded out-of-home care.

Across Australia, the vast majority (93%) of children in out-of-home care were placed in home-based care, primarily with foster carers or with relatives/kin (see Chapter 5), though a smaller number of carers also provide other types of care, including respite and long-term guardianship care (see Box 6.1 for carer types).

### Box 6.1: Carer types

**Respite carers:** Carers who provide short-term accommodation for children and young people, where the intention is for the child to return to their prior place of residence. Some carers are authorised to provide respite care only. Respite placements may include:

- *respite from birth family*—where a child is placed in out-of-home care on a temporary basis for reasons other than child protection (for example, the child’s parents are ill or unable to care for them on a temporary basis, as a family support mechanism to prevent entry into full-time care, as part of the reunification process, or as a formal 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.

**Long-term guardianship carers:** Carers who have been screened/authorised for the purpose of having a child placed with them under an order where parental responsibility is transferred to a third party. Long-term guardianship differs from foster or relative/kinship care in that the carer assumes parental responsibility for a long-term period (usually to the age of 18).

**Foster and relative/kinship care:** Foster care and relative/kinship care are forms of overnight care provided by 1 or more adults in a private household to a child who is living apart from their natural or adoptive parents.

- **Foster carers:** Carers who have been screened/authorised and reimbursed (or were offered but declined reimbursement) by the state/territory for the care of a foster child. There are varying degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers.
- **Relative/kinship carers:** Carers who have been screened/authorised to have relative/kin placed with them. The carer is a relative (other than parents), considered to be family or a close friend, or is a member of the child or young person’s community (in accordance with their culture) who is reimbursed (or who has been offered but declined reimbursement) by the state/territory for the care of the child.

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:

- There are varying degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers. For example, some carers are paid a wage beyond the reimbursement of expenses.
- Where a carer is authorised to provide both foster and relative/kinship care, they may be included in the count of both foster and relative/kinship carers.
- In some jurisdictions, respite carers known to the department are registered as either ‘general foster carers’ or ‘relative carers’ and therefore may 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 6.2).

**Box 6.2: Placements provided by all carer households at 30 June 2017**

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 may be approved/authorised to provide more than 1 care type.

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

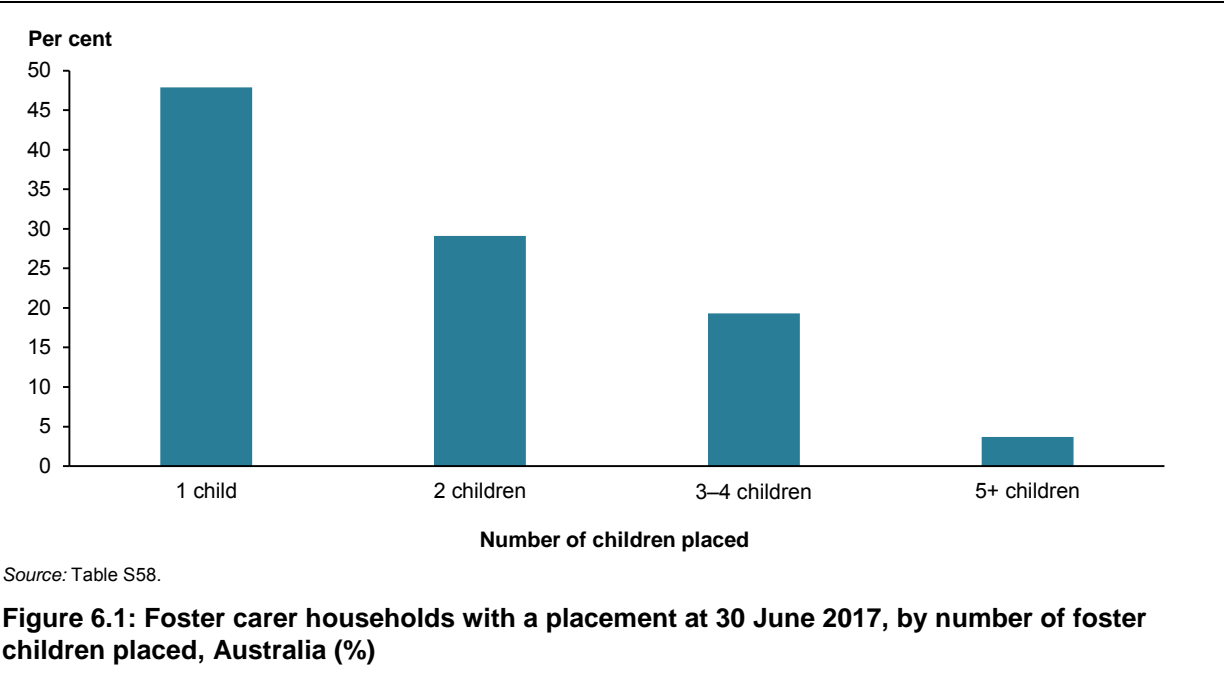
Unique household analyses exclude New South Wales. At 30 June 2017, there were 14,649 unique carer households with a placement. Of these, 58% had 1 child placed with them, 40% had 2–4 children placed, and 2% had 5 or more children placed with them (Table S57).

## 6.1 Foster and relative/kinship carer households

### Number of children placed in foster carer households

At 30 June 2017, there were 10,172 households with 1 or more foster care placements, with 52% of foster carer households having multiple children placed with them (Table S58).

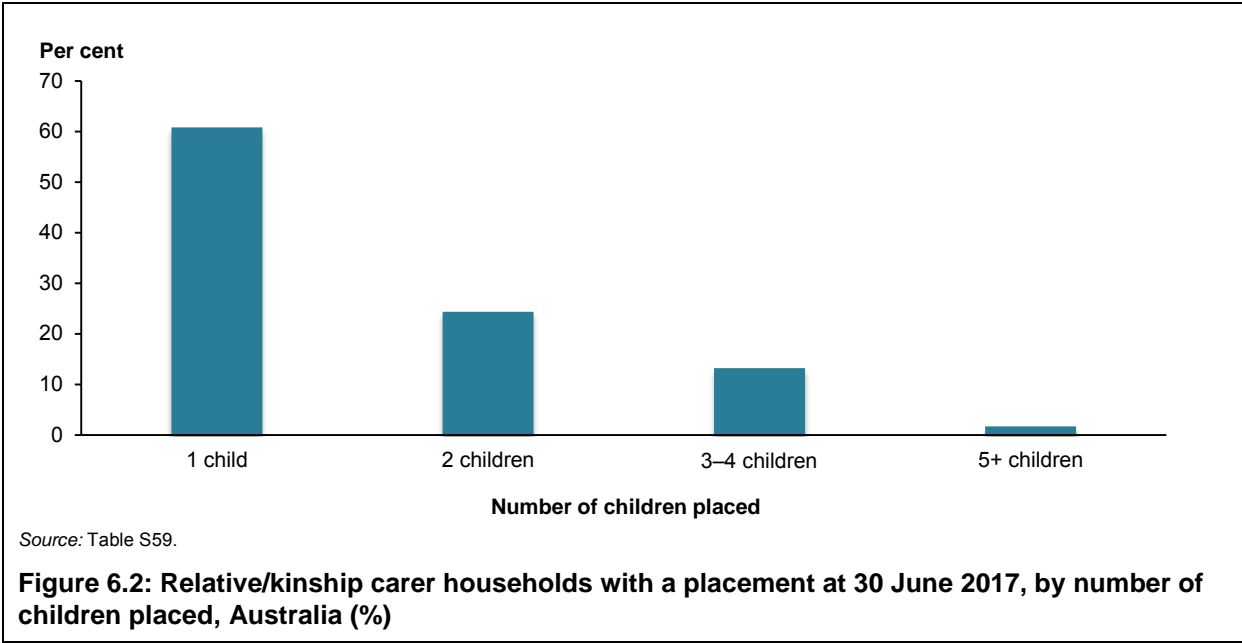
Most households with multiple placements had between 2 and 4 foster children placed, while nearly 4% of foster care households had 5 or more children (Figure 6.1). Households with multiple child placements may partially reflect that, in many jurisdictions, priority is given to keeping siblings together.



## Number of children placed in relative/kinship carer households

At 30 June 2017, there were 15,550 households with 1 or more relative/kinship care placements (Table S59), of whom 61% had 1 child placed with them, compared with 48% of foster carer households (Figure 6.2). These findings are similar to those for 2015–16 (AIHW 2017b).

Across Australia, 38% of households with a placement had between 2 and 4 children placed, and 2% had 5 or more.



## 6.2 Household commencements and exits

### Foster carer households

Among jurisdictions with available data, 1,944 households commenced foster care, and 1,649 exited foster care in 2016–17 (Table 6.1). With the need for foster carers increasing, the attraction and retention of appropriately skilled foster carers is a high priority across Australia (COAG 2009).

### Relative/kinship carer households

Among jurisdictions with available data, 5,425 households commenced relative/kinship care and 3,817 exited relative/kinship care in 2016–17 (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1: Households commencing and exiting care, states and territories, 2016–17 (number)**

Households	NSW <sup>(a)(b)</sup>	Vic	Qld <sup>(c)</sup>	WA	SA	Tas <sup>(d)</sup>	ACT	NT	Total
Households commencing foster care	492	368	417	357	130	59	34	87	<b>1,944</b>
Households exiting foster care	n.a.	591	517	232	153	68	4	84	<b>1,649</b>
Households commencing relative/kinship care	1,076	2,610	541	585	356	99	69	89	<b>5,425</b>
Households exiting relative/kinship care	n.a.	2,325	570	530	181	96	36	79	<b>3,817</b>

(a) NSW data include Department of Family and Community Services and non-government agency foster carer and relative/kinship carer households. This count excludes some non-government agency carer households, as no information is collected on their commencement date. The count of carer households commencing foster care in NSW is not a count of unique carer households, as some households may be authorised for more than 1 carer type.

(b) For households exiting foster or relative/kinship care, NSW was unable to provide data for 2016–17.

(c) Qld data do not include 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 for this table.

(d) In Tas, delays in administrative processes can result in carers being maintained as approved in the system when they are no longer accepting child placements. For the purpose of reporting households exiting foster or relative/kinship care, if no termination date is recorded, a foster or relative/kinship carer household that has not had a placement in 12 months is considered to have exited.

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017.

## 7 Intensive family support services

This chapter provides information on children commencing intensive family support services in 2016–17, which are funded by the state and territory departments responsible for child protection. Intensive family support services aim to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers due to child protection concerns, and to reunify families where separation has already occurred (see Box 7.1 for the criteria for intensive family support services).

In 2016–17, 236 intensive family support service providers delivered services across 249 locations (excluding Queensland).

### **Box 7.1: Intensive family support services**

To be included in the intensive family support services data collection, services must meet all the following criteria:

- They are provided explicitly to work to prevent separation or to reunify families.
- A range of services are provided 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.
- They are intensive in nature, averaging at least 4 hours of service provision 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. Work was previously undertaken to develop a Treatment and Support Services National Minimum Data Set; however, this has not been implemented for national reporting due to limited data availability and quality.

## 7.1 Children commencing services

In 2016–17, 25,295 children commenced intensive family support services (Table 7.1). Of these, 2 in 5 (41%) were aged under 5 (among those jurisdictions with available data) (Table 7.1).

The vast majority (88%) of children who commenced an intensive family support service were living with their parents (Table S60).

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

**Table 7.1: Children commencing intensive family support services, by age at commencement of service, states and territories, 2016–17 (number)**

Age group (years)	NSW	Vic	Qld <sup>(a)</sup>	WA	SA	Tas <sup>(b)</sup>	ACT	NT <sup>(c)</sup>	Total <sup>(d)</sup>
<b>Number</b>									
0–4	5,129	3,732	n.a.	341	432	588	165	n.a.	10,387
5–9	3,158	2,987	n.a.	230	255	570	119	n.a.	7,319
10–17	1,869	3,845	n.a.	198	219	593	103	n.a.	6,827
Unknown	25	326	n.a.	0	0	0	0	n.a.	351
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,181</b>	<b>10,890</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>906</b>	<b>1,751</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>25,295</b>
<b>%</b>									
0–4	50.4	34.3	..	44.3	47.7	33.6	42.6	..	41.7
5–9	31.0	27.4	..	29.9	28.1	32.6	30.7	..	29.4
10–17	18.4	35.3	..	25.7	24.2	33.9	26.6	..	27.4
Unknown	0.2	3.0	..	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	..	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>..</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>

(a) Queensland provides a range of services and support that fall within the definition of intensive family support services (IFSS). Data for 2016–17 are not available due to improvements currently under way to widen data collection in line with Queensland's scope of expenditure for IFSS. This has involved changes to data collection in Queensland's family support sector supported by the phased implementation of a new information system from 2015–16.

(b) Tasmanian data are compiled from aggregate data provided by Community Sector Organisations (CSOs). It should be noted that the information is not provided by all CSOs and the data provided is not validated. Tasmanian data should therefore be interpreted with extreme caution.

(c) Age break downs for children commencing intensive family support services not available for NT.

(d) The proportions for the total column have excluded NT counts from the calculation.

*Note:* Percentages in the table may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Source:* AIHW Child Protection Collection 2017.



# Appendix A: State and territory trend data

**Table A1: Child protection trend data, number of children in the child protection system, states and territories, 2012–13 to 2016–17 (number)**

Year	NSW <sup>(a)(b)</sup>	Vic	Qld <sup>(c)</sup>	WA <sup>(d)</sup>	SA <sup>(e)</sup>	Tas <sup>(f)(g)</sup>	ACT <sup>(h)</sup>	NT	Total
<b>Number</b>									
<b>Children receiving child protection services<sup>(i)</sup></b>									
2012–13	48,399	27,272	30,389	13,657	6,380	2,947	2,215	3,880	<b>135,139</b>
2013–14	53,250	28,949	29,585	15,385	7,083	2,609	1,635	4,527	<b>143,023</b>
2014–15	59,092	33,430	27,163	15,909	6,309	2,560	1,703	5,814	<b>151,980</b>
2015–16	64,330	37,357	27,842	15,375	6,204	2,579	2,388	6,100	<b>162,175</b>
2016–17	66,689	40,415	28,634	15,282	6,194	2,605	2,008	6,525	<b>168,352</b>
<b>Children who were the subject of substantiations<sup>(i)</sup></b>									
2012–13	16,236	10,048	7,149	2,686	1,836	918	494	1,204	<b>40,571</b>
2013–14	15,074	11,395	6,685	3,053	2,190	712	341	1,394	<b>40,844</b>
2014–15	15,022	13,300	5,869	3,382	1,908	833	386	1,757	<b>42,457</b>
2015–16	17,282	14,154	5,621	4,198	1,641	795	449	1,574	<b>45,714</b>
2016–17	18,919	15,488	5,767	4,633	1,526	755	317	1,910	<b>49,315</b>
<b>Children on care and protection orders<sup>(i)</sup></b>									
2012–13	16,373	7,751	9,211	4,260	2,798	1,253	674	816	<b>43,136</b>
2013–14	17,242	9,233	9,131	4,471	2,786	1,188	705	990	<b>45,746</b>
2014–15	18,496	10,135	9,269	4,808	3,019	1,183	747	1,073	<b>48,730</b>
2015–16	19,876	10,962	9,580	4,946	3,448	1,248	823	1,089	<b>51,972</b>
2016–17	20,453	12,354	9,716	5,138	3,686	1,316	889	1,114	<b>54,666</b>
<b>Children in out-of-home care<sup>(i)</sup></b>									
2012–13	17,422	6,542	8,136	3,425	2,657	1,067	558	742	<b>40,549</b>
2013–14	18,192	7,710	8,185	3,723	2,631	1,054	606	908	<b>43,009</b>
2014–15	16,843	8,567	8,448	3,954	2,838	1,061	671	1,017	<b>43,399</b>
2015–16	17,800	9,705	8,670	4,100	3,243	1,150	748	1,032	<b>46,448</b>
2016–17	17,879	10,312	8,941	4,232	3,484	1,205	803	1,059	<b>47,915</b>

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

(b) NSW out-of-home care data at 30 June 2015 onwards are not comparable with previous years' data. NSW Safe Home for Life (SHFL) legislative reforms, effective 29 October 2014, transitioned eligible children/young people to the independent care of their guardian. These children/young people exited and were no longer counted in out-of-home care.

(c) Data produced from the CP NMDS based on nationally agreed specifications may not match Qld figures published elsewhere. Qld data for 2014–15 onward are not comparable with data for previous years.

(d) WA out-of-home care data exclude children on third-party parental responsibility orders and from 2015–16 includes children placed in boarding schools.

(e) SA 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).

(f) Tas care and protection data may not be comparable year to year due to considerable data lag with the recording of order status.

(g) Tas out-of-home care 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.

(h) 'Children receiving child protection services' and 'out-of-home care' data for the ACT includes some young people 18 years and over whose carers receive a full carer payment. This is generally to facilitate completion of schooling without change to the placement.

- (i) Children receiving child protection services and children in substantiations were measured in financial years (2012–13, 2013–14, 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17). These data include unborn children and children of unknown age.
- (j) 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.

*Notes*

1. Some data may not match those published in previous *Child protection Australia* publications due to retrospective updates to data.
2. Rates were calculated using population data shown in tables S63 and S65. Please note for 2012–13 to 2015–16 population data used to calculate rates is based on the 2011 Census, and for 2016–17 is based on the 2016 Census.

*Sources:* AIHW Child Protection Collections 2012–13 to 2016–17; Tables S63 and S65.

**Table A2: Child protection trend data, rate of children in the child protection system, states and territories, 2012–13 to 2016–17 (rate)**

	NSW <sup>(a)(b)</sup>	Vic	Qld <sup>(c)</sup>	WA <sup>(d)</sup>	SA <sup>(e)</sup>	Tas <sup>(f)(g)</sup>	ACT <sup>(h)</sup>	NT	Total
<b>Number per 1,000</b>									
<b>Children receiving child protection services<sup>(i)</sup></b>									
2012–13	29.1	21.8	27.6	24.0	17.9	25.5	26.7	61.3	<b>26.0</b>
2013–14	31.7	22.9	26.6	26.5	19.8	22.7	19.3	71.3	<b>27.2</b>
2014–15	35.0	26.0	24.2	27.0	17.6	22.4	19.8	91.5	<b>28.6</b>
2015–16	37.6	28.6	24.6	25.8	17.2	22.7	27.3	96.1	<b>30.2</b>
2016–17	38.5	29.6	25.0	25.9	16.9	23.1	22.2	104.1	<b>30.8</b>
<b>Children who were the subject of substantiations<sup>(i)</sup></b>									
2012–13	9.8	8.0	6.5	4.7	5.2	8.0	6.0	19.0	<b>7.8</b>
2013–14	9.0	9.0	6.0	5.2	6.1	6.2	4.0	21.9	<b>7.8</b>
2014–15	8.9	10.4	5.2	5.7	5.3	7.3	4.5	27.6	<b>8.0</b>
2015–16	10.1	10.8	5.0	7.1	4.6	7.0	5.1	24.8	<b>8.4</b>
2016–17	10.9	11.3	5.0	7.8	4.2	6.7	3.5	30.5	<b>9.0</b>
<b>Children on care and protection orders<sup>(j)</sup></b>									
2012–13	9.8	6.2	8.3	7.4	7.8	10.9	8.1	12.8	<b>8.2</b>
2013–14	10.2	7.2	8.2	7.6	7.8	10.4	8.3	15.5	<b>8.7</b>
2014–15	10.9	7.8	8.2	8.1	8.4	10.4	8.6	16.9	<b>9.1</b>
2015–16	11.6	8.2	8.4	8.3	9.6	11.0	9.3	17.1	<b>9.6</b>
2016–17	11.8	8.9	8.4	8.7	10.1	11.7	9.7	17.7	<b>9.9</b>
<b>Children in out-of-home care<sup>(j)</sup></b>									
2012–13	10.4	5.2	7.4	5.9	7.4	9.3	6.7	11.6	<b>7.7</b>
2013–14	10.8	6.0	7.3	6.3	7.3	9.2	7.1	14.3	<b>8.1</b>
2014–15	9.9	6.6	7.5	6.7	7.9	9.3	7.7	16.0	<b>8.1</b>
2015–16	10.4	7.3	7.6	6.9	9.0	10.1	8.4	16.2	<b>8.6</b>
2016–17	10.3	7.5	7.8	7.1	9.5	10.7	8.8	16.8	<b>8.7</b>

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

(b) NSW out-of-home care data at 30 June 2015 onwards are not comparable with previous years' data. NSW Safe Home for Life (SHFL) legislative reforms, effective 29 October 2014, transitioned eligible children/young people to the independent care of their guardian. These children/young people exited and were no longer counted in out-of-home care.

(c) Data produced from the CP NMDS based on nationally agreed specifications may not match Qld figures published elsewhere. Qld data for 2014–15 onward are not comparable with data for previous years.

(d) WA data exclude children on third-party parental responsibility orders and from 2015–16 includes children placed in boarding schools.

(e) SA 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).

(f) Data for Tas may not be comparable year to year due to considerable data lag with the recording of order status.

(g) Tas out-of-home care 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.

(h) 'Children receiving child protection services' and 'out-of-home care' data for the ACT includes some young people 18 years and over whose carers receive a full carer payment. This is generally to facilitate completion of schooling without change to the placement.

(i) Children receiving child protection services and children in substantiations were measured in financial years (2012–13, 2013–14, 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17). These data include unborn children and children of unknown age.

(j) 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.

**Notes**

1. Some data may not match those published in previous *Child protection Australia* publications due to retrospective updates to data.
2. Rates were calculated using population data shown in tables S63 and S65. Please note for 2012–13 to 2015–16 population data used to calculate rates is based on the 2011 Census, and for 2016–17 is based on the 2016 Census.

Sources: AIHW Child Protection Collections 2012–13 to 2016–17; tables S63 and S65.

# Appendix B: Technical notes

## Population data

### 2016–17 data

In 2017, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released preliminary estimated resident population (ERP) based on the 2016 Census of Population and Housing. As estimates of the resident population for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children based on the 2016 Census were not available at the time of publication, Indigenous population projections based on the 2011 Census were used for 'Indigenous children' populations (ABS 2014c).

For 2016–17:

- 'All children' populations as at 30 June 2017 were derived from *Australian demographic statistics, June 2017* (ABS 2017b), and rebased to the 2016 Census
- 'Indigenous children' used 2011 Census-based Indigenous population projections (ABS 2014c)
- 'Non-Indigenous' populations were derived by subtracting the Indigenous projection count (ABS 2014c) from the 'all children' estimated resident populations (ERPs, ABS 2017b).

### Trend data

For *Child protection Australia 2016–17*, the AIHW has used the following population data:

- 'All children' populations as at 31 December 2013 were derived from *Australian demographic statistics, December 2013* (ABS 2014a).
- 'All children' populations as at 31 December 2014 were derived from *Australian demographic statistics, December 2014* (ABS 2015a).
- 'All children' populations as at 31 December 2015 were derived from *Australian demographic statistics, December 2015* (ABS 2016a).
- 'All children' populations as at 30 June 2013 to 2014 derived from *Australian demographic statistics, June 2014* (ABS 2014b).
- 'All children' populations as at 30 June 2015 were derived from *Australian demographic statistics, June 2015* (ABS 2015b).
- 'All children' populations as at 30 June 2016 were derived from *Australian demographic statistics, June 2016* (ABS 2016b).
- 'Indigenous children' populations (used to calculate Indigenous rates) were derived from the *Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026 (Series B)* (ABS 2014c).
- December Indigenous populations were calculated as the average of the June population projections either side of the December. For example, the December 2013 population for Indigenous children is the average of the June 2013 and June 2014 population projections.
- 'Non-Indigenous' populations were derived by subtracting the Indigenous projection count from the 'all children' estimated resident populations (ERPs).

Population estimates used in the calculation of historical rates are available in online supplementary tables (tables S63–S66). To maintain consistency in the trend rates reported in *Child protection Australia* the above data are based on the preliminary release, and are not retrospectively updated with each new release.

## Calculation of rates

### Rates for ‘all children’

The rates for ‘all children’ on care and protection orders and ‘all children’ in out-of-home care were calculated using the ABS most recent population estimates for 30 June 2017 (ABS 2017b). The rates of ‘All children’ who were the subjects of child protection substantiations during 2016–17 were calculated using the ABS population estimates for 31 December 2016 (ABS 2017a).

#### Rates of children on care and protection orders were calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0–17 on care and protection orders at 30 June 2017}}{\text{ABS estimated population of children aged 0–17 at 30 June 2017}} \times 1,000$$

#### Rates of children in out-of-home care were calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0–17 in out-of-home care at 30 June 2017}}{\text{ABS estimated population of children aged 0–17 at 30 June 2017}} \times 1,000$$

#### Rates of children who were the subjects of child protection substantiations were calculated in the following way:

$$\frac{\text{Number of children aged 0–17 who were the subjects of substantiations in 2016–17}}{\text{ABS estimated population aged 0–17 at 31 December 2016}} \times 1,000$$

Note that legislation and practices differ across jurisdictions in relation to children aged 17. In some jurisdictions, children aged 17 are not substantiated and this means the number per 1,000 children who were the subjects of substantiations may be lower for those jurisdictions. Where substantiation rates are calculated for the ‘less than 1’ and ‘0–17’ age groups, unborn children are excluded; these children are included in the calculation of substantiation rates for ‘All children’. As population estimates do not include unborn children, the ‘All children’ rate may represent a slight overestimate.

### Rates for ‘Indigenous’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ children

The same basic method outlined for rates for ‘All children’ was used to calculate the rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children; however, different methodologies were used to determine the denominators.

Rates for Indigenous children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care were calculated using the Indigenous population estimates for 30 June 2017 (ABS 2014c).

The rate of Indigenous children who were the subjects of child protection substantiations during 2016–17 was calculated using the average of the 30 June 2016 and 30 June 2017 Indigenous population projections as a proxy for 31 December 2016 (ABS 2014c).

Non-Indigenous population estimates were derived by subtracting the Indigenous population projections from the 'all children' population estimates.

Rates for states and territories with small numbers of children in their child protection data, and small Indigenous populations (notably the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania) should be interpreted carefully. Small changes in the numbers of Indigenous children in the child protection systems, or in population estimates, can have a large impact on rates.

### Rate ratio

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

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

Rate ratios are not calculated where 1 or both of the rates have fewer than 5 children or young people in the numerator.

## Age

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

Throughout *Child protection Australia 2016–17*, the AIHW has calculated age at different points in time for a child, depending on the analysis in question:

- For 30 June analyses, age was calculated as at 30 June 2017.
- For analyses of events occurring during the year, age was calculated at the relevant point in time during 2016–17:
  - For analyses of children who were the subject of a child protection notification or substantiation, age was calculated at the earliest date of notification during the period.
  - For analyses of children who were admitted to or discharged from a care and protection order or an out-of-home care placement, age was calculated at the date of first admission and first discharge during the period.
- For analyses of children receiving child protection services, age was calculated at the earliest point of contact during 2016–17, or at 1 July 2016 if the child was on an ongoing care and protection order, or in an ongoing out-of-home care placement at the beginning of the period.

## Average and median

Two measures of 'central tendency' (the central value or typical value for a probability distribution) are reported in *Child protection Australia 2016–17*:

- **Average (mean)**—is calculated by summing all the values, and dividing by the number of observations. In *Child protection Australia*, averages are used in the reporting of the average co-occurrence of abuse and neglect.
- **Median**—is the middle value of a set of observations, when arranged in order of value. Medians are often reported where data are not normally distributed, or include extreme

values that would distort the average. In *Child protection Australia*, median age is reported for several aspects of the child protection system, including children receiving child protection services, and children admitted to and discharged from out-of-home care.

## Identification of Indigenous status

### Children

The practices used to identify and record the Indigenous status of children vary across states and territories, with some jurisdictions recording large numbers of unknowns. No state or territory can validate the data on Indigenous children by other means, so the quality of the data is unknown.

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

### Caregivers

In the out-of-home care data collection, the Indigenous status of caregivers was collected as well as the Indigenous status of children in out-of-home care. Carers who are identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are included in the Indigenous category.

Where the Indigenous children were living in facility-based care specifically for Indigenous children, the caregiver was counted as Indigenous. Where children were living in other types of facility-based care, the caregiver was not counted as Indigenous.

## Points of analysis

### During the year

Counts of people during the year are calculated by counting each distinct person subject to the event of interest during the financial year. Each person is counted only once, even if that person had multiple occurrences of the event during the year.

For example, when calculating the number of children and young people who were the subjects of substantiations of child protection notifications during the year, a child or young person will be counted if a notification received during the financial year was substantiated. That child, however, will only contribute a count of 1, regardless of how many notifications were substantiated for them in the financial year.

### 30 June (at the end of the financial year)

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

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

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

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

## Trends

Trends are reported over the 5-year period from 2012–13 to 2016–17. Increases over time in the number or rate of children receiving child protection services or support may relate to changes in the underlying rate of child abuse and neglect, increases in notifications and access to services, or a combination of these factors.

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

Changes that have an impact on the data are provided as caveats to the data, and in Appendixes C–E (online) at <[www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/related-material)>.

## Socioeconomic area

*Child protection Australia* reporting uses the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), developed by the ABS to analyse socioeconomic status (ABS 2013a).

The SEIFA comprises 4 indexes that are constructed using information from the 5-yearly Census of Population and Housing. These indexes are the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage, the Index of Economic Resources, and the Index of Education and Occupation.

The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is used to compare the average level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. The IRSAD is the SEIFA index used in this report, ranking geographical areas on a continuum from 'highest socioeconomic status' to 'lowest socioeconomic status', using a combination of income, education, employment, occupation, housing, and other Census variables (ABS 2013a).

These Census variables relate to both advantage and disadvantage, including low or high levels of income and education. This index can be used to measure both disadvantage and advantage. A high score indicates a relatively high level of advantage and a relatively low level of disadvantage. An area containing some relatively disadvantaged people and some relatively advantaged people may have a low score on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage, due to the levels of disadvantage, but a relatively high score on the IRSAD, due to the existence of both advantage and disadvantage. Population-based quintiles are used.

Socioeconomic status is measured by allocating the relevant SEIFA population-based (2011 population) quintile score to postcode information available for the child or young person. Invalid, missing, or unknown postcodes of last known home address were excluded from the analysis.



Some postcode areas were split between 2 or more areas with different SEIFA scores. Where this was the case, the data were weighted according to the proportion of the population of the postcode area in each SEIFA area.

The SEIFA represents the average of all people living in the area, and not the socioeconomic status of a particular individual living in the area. As a result, socioeconomic analyses in *Child protection Australia* reporting indicate the level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage in the area corresponding to the postcode information available for the child or young person, not the level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage of the child or young person or their family.

If inferences are made about individuals in an area based purely on SEIFA (the characteristics of the area in which they live), they could be misleading. This brings the potential for error in any conclusions, referred to as the ecological fallacy. Area-level and individual-level socioeconomic disadvantage are interrelated but distinct concepts, and thus are measured differently.

Using its Socio-Economic Index for Individuals, the ABS found that the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory have the greatest proportions of highly socioeconomically diverse neighbourhoods and, as an aggregate measure, SEIFA captures only a fraction of the true level of disadvantage being experienced in these jurisdictions. SEIFA information used at a suburb or postcode level can have the effect of minimising the actual levels of disadvantage in some areas (ABS 2011).

## Remoteness

*Child protection Australia* reporting uses the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure developed by the ABS to analyse the remoteness of a child's usual place of residence at the time of notification, and the remoteness of a child's living arrangement (ABS 2014d).

The ASGS Remoteness Structure comprises of broad geographical regions—Remoteness Areas (RAs), which share common remoteness characteristics. This report uses remoteness areas that divide Australia into 5 categories—*Major cities, Inner regional, Outer regional, Remote* and *Very remote* Australia (ABS 2014d).

Remoteness areas are based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+), developed by the University of Adelaide. ARIA+ is based on road distances to services centres, and is used in conjunction with the ABS's Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1) to determine the remoteness of a particular region in Australia (ABS 2014d).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) uses postcodes to match remoteness information to child protection data. These data include postcode at notification and postcode of living arrangement.

Records with invalid, missing or unknown postcodes at notification and of living arrangements were excluded from the analysis. Additionally, New South Wales was excluded from the analyses of remoteness at notification, as data were not available. A small number of postcodes were split between 2 or more remoteness areas. For these instances, the data were weighted according to the proportion of the population of the postcode area in each remoteness area.

Some children and young people may appear in remoteness areas for which there is no population within that state or territory. This is due to records whose postcode is in a different state or territory to the one in which they received a notification, or were in out-of-home care.

# Glossary

**Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+):** The ARIA provides 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, or 'unborn' for those in utero and '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 care and protection orders, by type of living arrangements, and children in out-of-home care at 30 June show age at 30 June 2017. 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.

**anonymous:** Of unknown name.

**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 Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC):** A common framework defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for collecting and disseminating geographically classified statistics. The ASGC was implemented in 1984, and its final release was in 2011. It has been replaced by the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).

**Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS):** A common framework defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for collecting and disseminating geographically classified statistics. The ASGS replaced the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) in July 2011.

**capital city:** A state or territory capital city.

**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.

**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 regarding concerns about a child, where there is no indication that a child may have been or is at risk of being harmed through abuse or neglect. This may 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:** Describes 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 relative/kin**.

**family care:** A type of care where the child resides 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 regarding 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 2016 and 30 June 2017 that was investigated, with the investigation completed, and an outcome recorded by 31 August 2017. 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 that gives 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 that transfers 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 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. There are varying degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers.

**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 (there are varying degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers)
- 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 subject 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. There are 4 categories of home-based out-of-home care: **relatives/kin who are reimbursed, foster care, third-party parental 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 who, 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 who received provisional authorisation (which may be in order 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, but 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 may have voluntarily withdrawn/deregistered, or the relevant department or agency may 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); however, the minister may assign custody of the child to a willing and suitable person in the jurisdiction where a child resides. The assigned person becomes responsible for all matters concerning the child's daily activities, care, and welfare. This category captures the arrangements of these 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 the lead tenant in a household.

**Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD):** One of 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 variables relating to both advantage and disadvantage 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 aged less than 1.

**intensive family support services:** Services that aim to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers due to 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 reside 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.

**investigation:** The process where the relevant department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification received between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017. Departmental staff assess the harm or degree of harm to the child, as well as 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 that has begun for a notification made between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017 that was not able to be finalised in order to reach the outcome of 'substantiated' or 'not substantiated', and for which files were closed for administrative purposes. This may happen, for example, in cases where the family has relocated. For this report, these investigations were completed between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017.

**investigation in process:** An investigation that begun for a notification received between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017, but was not completed nor an outcome recorded by 31 August 2017.

**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 been responsible 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 residing. 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 where 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 carer:** 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:** An order that 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:** A 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.

**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.

**notification:** Contact made to an authorised department by persons 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.

**not stated:** Information that was unknown or not recorded.

**not substantiated:** A notification received between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017 where an investigation concluded that there was no reasonable cause to suspect prior, current or future abuse, neglect, or harm to the child.

**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; these are reported in the above categories.

**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, government agencies, and instrumentalities not elsewhere classified), as well as people who make notifications anonymously.

**out-of-home care:** Overnight care for children aged 0–17, where the state makes a financial payment, or 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 undertaken 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 in order to prevent imminent separation of children from their primary caregivers for child protection reasons.

**provisionally approved carer household:** Households who have received provisional authorisation (which may be in order to facilitate a placement of a child), while formal approval/registration is being finalised. This category is only used 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 (there are varying degrees of reimbursement made to relative/kinship carers)
- 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:** States and territories are 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 (ARIA+)** and defined as Remoteness Areas by either the **Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC)** (before 2011) or the **Australian Statistical Geographical Standard (ASGS)** (from 2011 onwards) in each Census year.

**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 on a temporary basis for reasons other than child protection (for example, the child's parents are ill or unable to care for them on a temporary basis, 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.

**respite-only carer:** Carer households that provide only respite care (see **respite care**).

**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, half-brother, sister, or half-sister, be it 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/welfare worker/psychologist/other trained welfare worker:** Any person engaged in providing a social-work or welfare-work service in the community.

**socioeconomic status:** An indication of how 'well off' a person or group is. In this report, socioeconomic status is mostly reported using the **Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas**, typically for 5 groups, from the lowest (worst off) to the highest socioeconomic status (best off).

**Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas:** A set of indexes, created from Census data that aim to represent the socioeconomic status of Australian communities, and identify areas of advantage and disadvantage. 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 in their socioeconomic status. This report uses the **Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage**.

**source of notification:** The person or organisation who 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**.

**substantiation of notification:** Child protection notification made to relevant authorities during the current year (for example, 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017) 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 should be 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 residing. See also **residential care, family group home, home-based out-of-home care, independent living, and other out-of-home care.**

**unknown Indigenous status:** Children whose Indigenous status was unknown.

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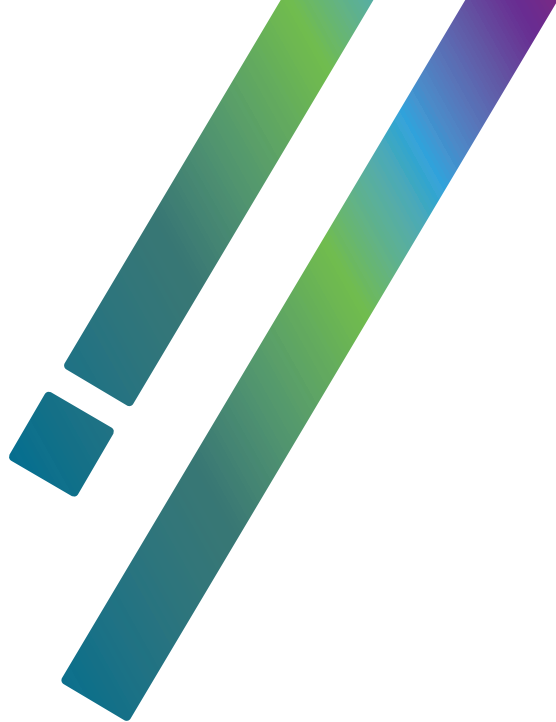
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## Related publications

This report, *Child protection Australia 2016–17*, is part of an annual series. Supplementary population data tables (those with a prefix of S) are part of the *Child protection Australia 2016–17* release. These tables, as well as earlier editions of the report, can be downloaded for free from the AIHW website <[www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection-publications](http://www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection-publications)>.

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

- AIHW 2012. A picture of Australia's children 2012. Cat. no. PHE 167. Canberra: AIHW.
- 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. Hospitalised injury in children and young people 2011–12. Injury research and statistics series no. 91. Cat. no. INJCAT 167. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2014. Indigenous child safety. Cat. no. IHW 127. 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 2015. Educational outcomes for children in care: linking 2013 child protection and NAPLAN data. Cat. no. CWS 54. 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 2017. Adoptions Australia 2016–17. Child welfare series no. 67. Cat. no. CWS 61. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2017. Australia's welfare 2017. Australia's welfare series no. 13. Cat. no. AUS 214. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2017. Children admitted to out-of-home care 2014–15. Bulletin no. 142. Cat. no. AUS 217. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2017. Young people in child protection and under youth justice supervision 2015–16. Data linkage series no. 23. Cat. no. CSI 25. Canberra: AIHW.



During 2016–17, 168,352 (30.8 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 7 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to have received child protection services. This report also showed that 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.

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