

National Child Protection Data Collection Data Quality Statement

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National Child Protection Data Collection Data Quality Statement

Identifying and definitional attributes

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Data quality

Data quality statement summary:

Summary of key issues

- The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) child protection data collection contains information on:
 - notifications, investigations and substantiations
 - care and protection orders
 - out-of-home care
 - foster carers
 - relative/kinship carers
 - intensive family support services.
- The AIHW compiles the national collection each year using data extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments responsible for child protection.
- Differences in jurisdictional policy, practice, legislation and data systems must be taken into consideration when interpreting all child protection data (see Appendices D–H of *Child Protection Australia 2011–12*).
- Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the child protection data collection are good. However, data availability issues mean a small number of tables in the collection do not provide fully national data; and in some jurisdictions there is a high proportion of children whose Indigenous status is unknown in relation to substantiated child abuse and neglect.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has improved the methodology used to obtain estimates of the resident population, which has caused a downward revision of estimates based on the 2011 Census. Due to these changes, comparisons of rates over time should be interpreted with caution.

Description

In Australia, statutory child protection is the responsibility of state and territory governments. Each state and territory department responsible for child protection provides assistance to vulnerable children who are suspected of being abused, neglected, or otherwise harmed, or whose parents are unable to provide adequate care or protection.

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 handling of child protection cases. Assistance is provided to children and their families through the provision of, or referral to, a wide range of services.

The data for this collection are collected from each of the eight state and territory departments responsible for child protection, and collated and analysed by the AIHW. The data are extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments according to definitions and technical specifications agreed to by those departments and the AIHW. This data collection represents the only national source of child protection data.

The collection is a part of the child welfare series. The agreement for ongoing funding of this series forms Schedule 3 of the National Community Services Information Infrastructure Agreement (NCSIIA). This agreement operates under the auspices of the Standing Council on Community and Disability Services Advisory Council (SCCDSAC), formerly the Community and Disability Services Ministerial Advisory Committee (CDSMAC).

Institutional environment: The AIHW is a major national agency set up by the Australian Government under the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987* to provide reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. It is an independent statutory authority established in 1987, governed by a management board and accountable to the Australian Parliament through the Health and Ageing portfolio.

The AIHW aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians through better health and welfare information and statistics. It collects and reports information on a wide range of topics and issues, ranging from health and welfare expenditure, hospitals, disease and injury and mental health to ageing, homelessness, disability and child protection.

The Institute also plays a role in developing and maintaining national metadata standards. This work contributes to improving the quality and consistency of national health and welfare statistics. The Institute works closely with governments and non-government organisations to achieve greater adherence to those standards in administrative data collections to promote national consistency and comparability of data and reporting.

One of the main functions of the AIHW is to work with the states and territories to improve the quality of administrative data and, where possible, to compile national data sets based on data from each jurisdiction, to analyse the data sets and disseminate information and statistics.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act, in conjunction with the compliance provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cwth), ensures that the data collections managed by the AIHW are kept securely and under the strictest conditions to preserve privacy and confidentiality.

For further information, see the AIHW website <www.aihw.gov.au>.

Timeliness: The reference period for the 2011–12 child protection collection is from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012. Data relating to child protection investigations includes investigation outcomes recorded up until 31 August 2012, to maximise the currency of these data items.

The state and territory departments responsible for child protection provide data to the AIHW annually, after the end of each financial year. For the 2011–12 collection, the first iteration of data was due to the AIHW by 26 September 2012, and data were finalised for all states and territories in November 2012. Data from the 2011–12 child protection collection were published in March 2013.

The data for each collection period are released in the AIHW's *Child protection Australia* annual publication.

Accessibility: Publications containing national child protection data, including the annual *Child protection Australia* reports, are available on the AIHW website <www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection/>. These reports are available free of charge. Concurrent with the annual publication, key findings are also presented online.

Requests for unpublished data can be made by contacting the AIHW on (02) 6244 1000 or via email to info@aihw.gov.au. A cost-recovery charge may apply to requests that take substantial resources to compile. Depending on the nature of the request, requests for access to unpublished data may require approval from the state and territory data custodians and/or the AIHW Ethics Committee.

General inquiries about AIHW publications can be made to the Communications, Media and Marketing Unit on (02) 6244 1032 or via email to info@aihw.gov.au.

Interpretability: Supporting information on relevant mandatory reporting requirements, legislation, jurisdictional policy and data systems are presented in the appendixes of the *Child protection Australia* reports. Supporting information is also provided in the footnotes accompanying tables and the report Glossary. Chapter 1 of the report provides an overview of the child protection process and data collection. Readers are advised to consider all supporting and contextual information to ensure appropriate interpretation of analyses presented by the AIHW.

Metadata for the child protection collection is currently being updated for entry on to METeOR, the AIHW's online metadata repository.

Relevance:

The child protection collection is the authoritative source of national Australian child protection data.

The collection includes several modules on notifications, investigations, substantiations; care and protection orders; out-of-home care, foster and relative/kinship carers; and intensive family support services. Where available, these collections provide information on children within each system and the child protection cases, placements and households relating to children.

The three primary modules (notifications, investigations and substantiations; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care) include a range of information about children who come into contact with the child protection system, including their age, sex, Indigenous status and living arrangements. Data are also collected on the main type of substantiated abuse or neglect that has occurred: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect.

The collection also includes numbers of admissions to, and discharges from, care and protection orders and out-of-home care; and information on households providing foster and relative/kinship care placements.

In addition to providing information on the current collection period, the collection also allows for some trends to be examined. As part of the 'child welfare' schedule under the National Community Services Information Infrastructure Agreement, the collection is a valuable source for monitoring various components of the child protection system. Overall, these data give a detailed view of statutory child protection in Australia.

Data sourced from national child protection collections are used for reporting under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* and in the annual *Report on Government Services*.

Accuracy:

Data for the child protection data collections are extracted each year from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments responsible for child protection in Australia, according to definitions and technical specifications agreed to by the departments and the AIHW. Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the child protection data collection are good.

Scope and coverage

National child protection data are only based on those cases reported to departments responsible for child protection and therefore 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 only included if they were also referred to departments responsible for child protection.

There are significant links and overlaps between the notifications, investigations and substantiations; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care data modules. For example, children who are the subject of substantiations may be placed on care and protection orders, and many children on care and protection orders are also in out-of-home care. However, very limited national data are available on the movement of children through the child protection system or the overlaps between the separate data modules. A unique count of children in the child protection system cannot be obtained using the current methodology.

Each year a number of children are the subject of more than one notification and/or substantiation during the year. However, the current available aggregate data do not allow the calculation of the exact proportion of children who were the subject of more than one notification or substantiation in any given year.

Work is being undertaken to broaden the scope of the national data collection and to improve comparability of data across jurisdictions—primarily through the development of a unit record (child level) data collection, which will replace the current aggregate collection from July 2013 (see Appendix J of *Child Protection Australia 2011–12* for details).

Data quality

Overall, the quality and coverage of data in the child protection data collection are good. However, data availability affects the interpretability of some data presented:

- For data on *substantiations of notifications received during 2011–12, by type of abuse or neglect*, Victoria and South Australia report a large proportion of family types in the 'not stated' category (97% and 49%, respectively) and, as such, have not been included in the total. Data are also not available for New South Wales.
- *Children aged 0–17 who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2011–12, by Indigenous status* should be interpreted with caution due to the high proportion of children whose Indigenous status was unknown in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania (34%, 20% and 17%, respectively).
- Care and protection orders issued, by type of order are not available for South Australia.
- Children substantiated in 2010–11 and subsequently placed on care and protection orders within 12 months are not available for New South Wales.
- Households exiting foster care are not available for New South Wales.
- Relative/kinship carer households with a placement at 30 June are not available for the Northern Territory.
- Relative/kinship carer households with a placement during the year are not available for Queensland and the Northern Territory.
- Households commencing relative/kinship care are not available for the Northern Territory.
- Households exiting relative/kinship care are not available for New South Wales and the Northern Territory.
- Number of children aged 0–17 commencing intensive family support services are not available for Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

Coherence:

National child protection data has been provided to the AIHW since 1993 under the agreement between the Commonwealth, the states and territories and the AIHW concerning the provision of data on welfare services. In 1993, separate reports were published on child abuse and neglect (*Child abuse and neglect Australia 1990–91*) and care and protection orders (*Children under care and protection orders Australia 1990–91*).

Child protection Australia 1996–97 contained consolidated information on several child protection modules (notifications, investigations, substantiations; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care) for the first time. *Child protection Australia* has subsequently been released as an annual report in that format. Limited data on intensive family support services were included for the first time in *Child protection Australia 2003–04*. Data on foster carer households were included for the first time in *Child protection Australia 2009–10* and relative/kinship carer data were included for the first time in *Child protection Australia 2010–11*.

It is standard practice to present 5-year trends in data, as changes in state and territory legislation, policy/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 relevant appendixes to *Child Protection Australia* reports.

Notifications, investigations and substantiations data for non-Indigenous children before 2009–10 included children of unknown Indigenous status. Following improvements to the data collection methodology in 2009–10, these children are able to separately identified and excluded from the non-Indigenous count. Therefore, there is a break in the time series for children in substantiations by Indigenous status between 2008–09 and 2009–10.

The ABS has improved the methodology used to obtain estimates of the resident population, which has caused a downward revision of estimates based on the 2011 Census. Due to these changes, comparisons of rates over time should be interpreted with caution.

Data products

Implementation start date: 13/02/2013

Source and reference attributes

Submitting organisation: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)