

National Child Protection Data Collection, 2015-16; Quality Statement

Identifying and definitional attributes

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Data quality

Quality statement summary:

Summary of key issues

- The Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS), implemented for reporting from 2012–13, was the main data source for this report.
- The CP NMDS contains information on:
 - notifications, investigations and substantiations
 - care and protection orders
 - out-of-home care
 - foster, relative/kinship and other authorised carers

Data relating to intensive family support services are also reported in *Child protection Australia*, but are based on a separate aggregate collection.

- 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. Data represent a ‘snapshot’ of the data at the time of extraction and may not include retrospective updates made to data held by state/territory departments. Data produced from the CP NMDS based on nationally agreed specifications may not match state and territory figures published elsewhere and may not be comparable with data for previous years.
- Unit record level data were not available for New South Wales in 2015–16; aggregate data have been reported.
- Prior to 2015–16, aggregate carer data was provided for the Northern Territory. In 2015–16 these data have been sourced from the CP NMDS and are not comparable with data for previous years.
- 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. Further, in relation to substantiated child abuse and neglect, there is a high proportion of children whose Indigenous status is unknown in some jurisdictions.
- Differences in jurisdictional policy, practice, legislation and data systems must be taken into consideration when interpreting all child protection data (see [appendixes B-G \(online\)](#) of *Child protection Australia 2015–16*).
- All rates in this report were calculated using the 2011 Census-based population estimates, including back-cast historical estimates. Therefore, rates presented in this report are not comparable with rates calculated using estimates based on the 2006 Census, including those published in editions of *Child protection Australia* prior to *Child protection Australia 2013–14*.
- Some data included in this report may not match data reported in the RoGS due to retrospective updates to state/territory data and differences in the data extraction and analysis methodologies.

Description

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 and young people 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. Children and their families are assisted by being provided with, or referred 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 the AIHW validates, collates and analyses these data. The CP NMDS was implemented in 2012–13. The data are extracted from the administrative systems of the state and territory departments according to definitions and technical specifications to which those departments and the AIHW have agreed. This data collection represents the only national source of child protection data.

The collection is a part of the child welfare series of reporting. Ongoing funding of this series is specified in the Memorandum of Understanding between the AIHW and state and territory departments responsible for children and families services and in the associated 3-year Schedule (2014–2016) for national child protection work. Work is overseen by informal working groups, including the Children and Families Data Network.

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* (Cwth) to provide reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare. It is an independent corporate Commonwealth entity 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 1987, 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 2015–16 National Child Protection Data Collection is from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016. Data relating to child protection investigations includes investigation outcomes recorded up until 31 August 2016, 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 2015–16 collection, the first iteration of data was due to the AIHW by 13 September 2016, and data were finalised for all states and territories in December 2016. Data from the 2015–16 Child Protection Collection were published in March 2017. 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 <http://www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection-publications/>. These reports are available free of charge. Concurrent with the annual publication, key findings are also presented online <http://www.aihw.gov.au/child-protection/>.

Requests for unpublished data can be made by contacting the AIHW. See <http://www.aihw.gov.au/data/>. 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 Digital and Media Communications 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 at the [appendixes B–G \(online\)](#) 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 that the AIHW presents.

Metadata for the CP NMDS is available on METeOR, the AIHW's online metadata repository, and can be accessed at the following page: </content/index.phtml/itemId/656494>

Relevance: The Child Protection Collection is the authoritative source of national Australian child protection data. The collection includes several modules on notifications, investigations and substantiations; care and protection orders; out-of-home care, authorised carers including 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 overlaps between the three primary modules (notifications, investigations and substantiations; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care) have also been analysed at the national level. The collection has 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 and the co-occurrence of these types of abuse or neglect. The collection also includes the 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.

As well as providing information on the current collection period, the collection also enables some trends to be examined, providing a valuable source of data 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* (see <http://www.aihw.gov.au/nfpac/>) and in the annual RoGS for all jurisdictions except New South Wales (see <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services>).

Accuracy: Data for the child protection 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. Data represent a 'snapshot' of the data at the time of extraction and may not include retrospective updates made to data held by state/territory departments. Data produced from the CP NMDS based on nationally agreed specifications may not match state and territory figures published elsewhere and may not be comparable with data for previous years. Some data included in this report may not match data reported in the RoGS due to retrospective updates to state/territory data and differences in the data extraction and analysis methodologies.

Scope and coverage

National child protection data are based only 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 included only if they were also referred to departments responsible for child protection.

As children may receive a combination of child protection services there are important 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 subjects 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. The overall number of children receiving child protection services—along with the overlaps between the separate data modules—have been reported since 2012–13.

Each year, a number of children are the subjects of more than one notification and/or substantiation during the year. The proportion of children who were the subject of more than one substantiation in the year have also been reported since 2012–13.

Ongoing work is being undertaken on the CP NMDS to broaden the scope of the national data collection and to improve quality and comparability of data across jurisdictions.

Data quality

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

- Socioeconomic status and remoteness analyses are based on postcode at the time of notification, and/or of the living arrangement. It should be noted that postcode can be recorded at different times: at the time the abuse or neglect took place, or at the time of the notification, investigation or substantiation.
- *Children aged 0–17 who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2015–16, by Indigenous status* should be interpreted with caution due to the high proportion of children whose Indigenous status was unknown in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (14% and 9%, respectively).
- New South Wales data does not include children on finalised supervisory orders. Disaggregation of finalised guardianship or custody orders and finalised third-party parental responsibility orders into long- and short-term categories was not available.
- New South currently does not strictly conform to the national counting rules for admissions to care and protection orders.
- Data on out-of-home carer households on an average day by authorisation type were not available for New South Wales and Queensland.
- Data on households exiting foster care and relative/kinship care were not available for New South Wales.
- Data on out-of-home carer households on an average day by authorisation type were not available for New South Wales and Queensland. The count of unique carer households also excludes New South Wales.
- Data on children commencing intensive family support services were not available for the Northern Territory. Data on the living arrangements of children commencing intensive family support services were not available for South Australia and Tasmania.
- Data on the relationship of relative/kinship carers was not available for New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Coherence:

National child protection data have been provided to the AIHW since 1993 under the agreement between the Australian Government, 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 data 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*. The ability to replicate and expand on existing national reporting was the primary focus of the CP NMDS when it was implemented in 2012–13. Existing national technical specifications were retained and clarified as part of this process.

New analyses included for the first time in *Child protection Australia 2012–13* related to:

- unique children receiving child protection services in each jurisdiction
- the number of substantiations per child
- co-occurring types of abuse and neglect
- socioeconomic status
- average day measures of children on orders; children in out-of-home care; and carer households approved/authorised to provide funded out-of-home care placements.

Queensland supplied unit record files for the first time in 2014–15. Queensland data for 2014–15 onward are not comparable with data for previous years.

The Northern Territory provided unit record carer data for the first time in 2015–16, which may not be comparable to aggregate data provided by the Northern Territory prior to 2015–16.

The following changes were made to CP NMDS collection and reporting in 2015–16:

- The categories for order type were expanded to disaggregate long-term and short-term orders for finalised guardianship or custody orders and third-party parental responsibility orders; and new response options for finalised adoption orders and orders made for unaccompanied humanitarian minors were added.
- A new response option of 'Third-party parental responsibility care arrangement' was added to capture the living arrangements for children on third-party parental responsibility orders.

Changes and new analyses included for the first time in *Child protection Australia 2015–16* include:

- Remoteness analyses for children who were the subject of substantiations and children in out-of-home care.
- Preliminary analyses relating to the relationship of relative/kin carers to children in relative/kinship placements.
- Expanded reporting on long-term alternative care arrangements for children who have been continuously in care for 2 or more years including legal arrangement and analysis of time in one main care arrangement by the number of unique care arrangements.
- Data on the number of unique carer households by the number of children placed at 30 June (regardless of placement type or carer household authorisation type).

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 appendices to *Child protection Australia* reports.

The revised methodology used by the ABS to obtain estimates of the resident population for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in 2013–14 resulted in an increase in estimates of the number of Indigenous Australians based on the 2011 Census compared with those based on the 2006 Census. This means that rates calculated with the 2011 Indigenous population estimates are lower than those based on the 2006 Census. To maintain consistency in the denominator and allow

comparisons over time, all rates for the period 2011–12 to 2015–16 have been calculated using the 2011 Census-based population estimates, including back-cast historical estimates. Therefore, rates presented in this report are not comparable with rates calculated using estimates based on the 2006 Census, including those published in editions of *Child protection Australia* prior to *Child protection Australia 2013–14*.

Data products

Implementation start date: 01/07/2015

Source and reference attributes

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