

Child Protection National Minimum Dataset, 2016–17 Data Quality Statement

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Identifying and definitional attributes

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Data quality

Data quality statement summary:

Summary of key issues

- The Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS), implemented for reporting from 2012–13 contains information on:
 - notifications, investigations and substantiations
 - care and protection orders
 - out-of-home care
 - foster, relative/kinship and other authorised carers
- The AIHW compiles data for the CP NMDS 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 2016–17; aggregate data are used for national child protection reporting.
- 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 Tasmania.
- Differences in jurisdictional policy, practice, legislation and data systems must be taken into consideration when interpreting all child protection data (see [appendixes C–E \(online\)](#) of *Child protection Australia 2016–17*).
- Some data derived from the CP NMDS included in *Child protection Australia 2016–17* may not match data reported in the *Report on Government Services 2018* 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 (2017–18 to 2019–20) 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* (Cwlth) 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 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* (Cwlth), 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.

Data for the CP NMDS are provided to the AIHW annually from 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.

Timeliness: The reference period for the 2016–17 CP NMDS is from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2017. Data relating to child protection investigations includes investigation outcomes recorded up until 31 August 2017, 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 2016–17 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 2017. Data from the 2016–17 Child Protection Collection were published in March 2018.

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 (see <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-welfare-services/child-protection/reports>). These reports are available free of charge. Concurrent with the annual publication, key findings are also presented online as a web report that can be accessed via the same link as above.

Requests for unpublished data can be made by contacting the AIHW (see <https://www.aihw.gov.au/our-services/data-on-request>). 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 (02) 6244 1000 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 C–E \(online\)](#) of the *Child protection Australia* reports, and online at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-statistics/health-welfare-services/child-protection/child-protection-legislation-by-jurisdiction>.

Supporting information is also provided in the footnotes accompanying supplementary data tables (see <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17/data>).

Chapter 1 of the *Child protection Australia 2016–17* report (see <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2016-17>), and the glossary provides definitions of key child protection terms 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 CP NMDS is the authoritative source of national Australian child protection data.

The CP NMDS 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 CP NMDS are used for reporting under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (see www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/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/2018/community-services/child-protection>).

Scope and coverage

CP NMDS 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.

Accuracy:

Data for the CP NMDS 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.

Differences in data reported from the CP NMDS across *Child protection Australia* and the *RoGS* may be due to retrospective updates to state/territory data and differences in the data extraction and analysis methodologies.

Data quality

Overall, the quality and coverage of the CP NMDS 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.
- When looking at subsets within the CP NMDS, analyses should be interpreted with caution due to the high proportion of children whose Indigenous status was unknown in Tasmania. Indigenous status was unknown for 24% of Tasmanian children aged 0–17 who were the subjects of substantiations of notifications received during 2016–17.
- 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 households exiting foster care and relative/kinship care were not available for New South Wales.
- Data on children commencing intensive family support services were not available for Queensland due to improvements currently underway to widen data collection in alignment with Queensland's scope of expenditure for Intensive Family Support Services. Data on the age of 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. Jurisdictions with missing data were excluded from the denominator when calculating proportions.
- Data on the relationship of relative/kinship carers was not available for New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Data presented covers 36% of children in placements with relatives/kin.

Where data are missing for one or more jurisdiction(s), totals reported may be an undercount.

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. These data were provided in aggregate format by the state or territory departments responsible for child protection from 1990–91 to 2011–12.

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. From 2012–13 onwards the CP NMDS included data for all jurisdictions except New South Wales and Queensland who continued to provide aggregate child protection data.

Queensland supplied unit record CP NMDS 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. Changes to codes for national order types between 2014–15 and 2015–16 should be considered when conducting analyses of children on care and protection orders by type of order.
- 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. In 2016–17 this living arrangement was further disaggregated into 3 categories to indicate the child's placement type before their third-party parental care placement (response options include: third-party—foster care; third-party—relative/kinship care and third-party—other/unknown). This additional disaggregation enabled children on third-party parental responsibility orders to be included in the measure 'children in relative/kinship placements at 30 June 2017, by relationship of relative/kinship carer' for reporting.

Due to differences in underlying policy/practice and system constraints, not all jurisdictions were able to utilise these categories resulting in variability in the living arrangements recorded for children on third-party parental responsibility orders across jurisdictions.

- Some records in Victoria and all records in South Australia for children on third-party orders with a living arrangement of foster or relative/kinship care at 30 June 2017 had their living arrangement recoded to their respective third-party—foster care or third-party—relative/kinship care living arrangement. All other living arrangements for children on third-party parental responsibility orders were classified as third-party parental care—other/unknown.
- The introduction of these separate categories for third-party parental care has resulted in a fall in the number of children recorded as being in foster, relative/kinship care, and other home-based care in some jurisdictions where the category has been adopted.

The standard AIHW practice is 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 CP NMDS 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.

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.

Data products

Implementation start date: 01/07/2016

Source and reference attributes

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

Relational attributes

**Related metadata
references:**

Has been superseded by [Child Protection National Minimum Dataset, 2017–18
Data Quality Statement](#)
[AIHW Data Quality Statements](#), Standard 08/03/2019