

# Child Protection National Minimum Dataset, 2020–21 Data Quality Statement

## Identifying and definitional attributes

**Metadata item type:** Quality Statement  
**METEOR identifier:** 757571  
**Registration status:**

- [AIHW Data Quality Statements](#), Standard 15/06/2022

## Data quality

## Quality statement summary:

### Description

The data for this collection are collected from each of the eight state and territory departments responsible for child protection. 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.

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 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) validates data for seven jurisdictions who provide unit record data and collates and analyses data for all eight jurisdictions following supply of aggregate data by New South Wales. The Child Protection National Minimum Dataset (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 (2020–21 to 2022–23) for national child protection work. Work is overseen by commonwealth-state/territory working groups, including the Children and Families Data Network.

### Summary of key issues

- The CP NMDS implemented for reporting from 2012–13, contains information on:
  - client demographics
  - notifications, investigations and substantiations
  - care and protection orders
  - out-of-home care
  - foster, relative/kinship and other authorised carers
  - safety in care (from 2020–21).
- 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 are based on nationally agreed specifications and 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 2020–21; 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 affect the interpretability of some data which are outlined below and in *Child protection Australia 2020–21*.
- Differences in jurisdictional policy, practice, legislation and data systems must be taken into consideration when interpreting all child protection data (see appendixes A–C of *Child protection Australia 2020–21*).

**Institutional environment:** The AIHW is an independent corporate Commonwealth entity under the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987](#) (AIHW Act), governed by a [management Board](#) and accountable to the Australian Parliament through the Health portfolio.

The AIHW is a nationally recognised information management agency. Its purpose is to create authoritative and accessible information and statistics that inform decisions and improve the health and welfare of all Australians.

Compliance with confidentiality requirements in the AIHW Act, Privacy Principles in the [Privacy Act 1988](#) (Cth), and AIHW's data governance arrangements ensures that the AIHW is well positioned to release information for public benefit while protecting the identity of individuals and organisations.

For further information see the AIHW website [www.aihw.gov.au/about-us](http://www.aihw.gov.au/about-us), which includes details about the AIHW's governance ([www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-governance](http://www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-governance)), and vision and strategic goals ([www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-vision-and-strategic-goals](http://www.aihw.gov.au/about-us/our-vision-and-strategic-goals)).

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.

Data for the CP NMDS are extracted from administrative systems by state and territory departments responsible for child protection in Australia. These state and territory departments are the:

- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victoria
- Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, Queensland
- Department of Communities, Western Australia
- Department for Child Protection, South Australia
- Department of Communities, Tasmania
- Community Services Directorate, Australian Capital Territory
- Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, Northern Territory

These state and territory departments extract data from administrative data sets according to nationally agreed definitions and technical specifications. This data is then supplied to the AIHW as unit record (child-level) files and forms the basis of the CP NMDS. Any previously unpublished state/territory specific data extracted from the CP NMDS requires approval from jurisdictional data custodians prior to release. An exception is made for the Department of Communities and Justice, New South Wales, where data is provided as aggregate counts.

The *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*, in conjunction with the compliance provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth), 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](http://www.aihw.gov.au).

**Timeliness:** The reference period for the 2020–21 CP NMDS is from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. Data relating to child protection investigations includes investigation outcomes recorded up until 31 August 2021, 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 2020–21 collection, the first iteration of data was due to the AIHW in September 2021, and data were finalised for all states and territories in December 2021. Data from the 2020–21 Child Protection Collection were published in May 2022.

The data for each collection period are released in the AIHW's *Child protection Australia* annual publication. Safety in care data for 2020-21 were published in a standalone report in December 2021.

**Accessibility:** Publications containing national child protection data, including the annual Child protection Australia reports, are available on the AIHW website. These reports are available free of charge. Requests for unpublished data can be made by contacting the AIHW website. See [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](mailto:info@aihw.gov.au)

**Interpretability:** Supporting information on relevant mandatory reporting requirements, legislation, jurisdictional policy and data systems are presented in appendixes A–C of the *Child protection Australia* reports. Supporting information is also provided in the footnotes accompanying supplementary data tables.

The first section of the [Child protection Australia 2020–21](#) report, Understanding child protection, provides an overview of the child protection process and data collection, and the glossary provides definitions of key child protection terms.

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/748197](#)

**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 safety in care from 2020–21. Where available, these modules provide information on children within each system and the child protection cases, placements and households relating to children and the services provided.

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 date of birth, 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 the CP NMDS are used for reporting:

- in the annual *Child protection Australia* publications;
- in the *Safety of children in care 2020–21* publication (see [www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/safety-of-children-in-care-2020-21](http://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/safety-of-children-in-care-2020-21));
- in *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* (see <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/protecting-australias-children>);
- in the annual publication for *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Indicators* (for the latest publication, see <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/atsicpp-indicators/contents/about>);
- in the annual *Report on Government Services* for all jurisdictions except New South Wales (see <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/community-services/child-protection>).

## Scope and coverage

CP NMDS data are based only on those cases reported to departments responsible for child protection. Therefore, it is likely the true prevalence of child abuse and neglect across Australia is understated. 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.

The CP NMDS also includes data on safety in care. This refers to children who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse that occurred while they were in the care of the state. This includes abuse while the child was in out-of-home care, on a third party parental order, or on an order that transfers full or partial parental responsibility to an agent of the state or territory. These data have been reported since 2020–21.

## Accuracy:

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 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 quality

Overall, the quality and coverage of the CP NMDS are good. However, data availability can affect the interpretability of some data.

- Socioeconomic status and remoteness analyses are based either SA2 or postcode at the time of notification, and/or of the living arrangement. It should be noted that SA2 or 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.
- Differences may exist across jurisdictions in how disability is defined and captured. Disability status is available for 63% of children in out-of-home care with disability status not stated for 37% of children in out-of-home care.
- New South Wales data does not include children on finalised supervisory orders and does not strictly conform to the national counting rules for admissions to care and protection orders.
- Tasmania 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.
- Some data on carer households were not available for New South Wales.
- Due to recording issues in the Northern Territory, sexual exploitation is under-reported.
- Data on the relationship of relative/kinship carers was not available for New South Wales, South 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. From 2018–19, the counting methodology for kinship care has been redefined in the Northern Territory. As a result, kinship care that has previously been counted under the 'foster care' category has been separated into foster and kinship to provide a more accurate reflection of the care provided.

The following changes were made to CP NMDS collection and reporting in 2020–21:

- Jurisdictions supplied data for a new Safety in Care file. These data were published in a standalone report *Safety of children in care 2020–21*.

A nationally consistent definition for out-of-home care was implemented for all jurisdictions in 2018–19 and in 2019–20 the out-of-home care data were back cast to 2016–17 using the national definition. Due to data revisions, data for 2016–17 and 2017–18 may differ from those published elsewhere. Data should not be compared with data published in previous versions of *Child protection Australia reports*.

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 extracted from the CP NMDS 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. Furthermore, data produced from the CP NMDS is based on nationally agreed specifications and may not match state and territory figures published elsewhere or be comparable with data for previous years.

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

## Data products

Implementation start date: 01/07/2020

## Source and reference attributes

Submitting organisation: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

## Relational attributes

### Related metadata references:

Supersedes [Child Protection National Minimum Dataset, 2019–20 Data Quality Statement](#)

- [AIHW Data Quality Statements](#), Standard 05/05/2021