

Annual report on the performance of the Queensland child protection system

Section 40 of the Act requires us to report annually on:

- Queensland's performance in relation to achieving state and national goals relating to the child protection system
- Queensland's performance over time in comparison to other jurisdictions
- Queensland's progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

This chapter delivers on this legislative requirement. For this report, we have used the most current performance data available to the QFCC, including by scanning agencies' reports and data sets. We also invited agencies to share any information they thought should be included in our reporting.

The Act defines the child protection system as 'the system of services provided by relevant agencies to children and young people in need of protection or at risk of harm.' It includes preventative and support services to prevent harm to children and young people, and strengthen and support families. Using this definition, we assessed Queensland's performance across 2022–23 against:

- state goals in the *Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–2023* whole-of-government strategyⁱ
- national goals (focus areas) in *Safe and Supported: The national framework for protecting Australia's children 2021–2031*ⁱⁱ
- key indicators from the *Family Matters*ⁱⁱⁱ and *Closing the Gap*^{iv} reports (reducing the numbers of, and improving outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people).

There are overlaps between the goals in state and national strategies. Rather than addressing each separately, we have reported against state and national goals by aligning them against five common themes (see Table 3):

1. Is the Queensland child protection and family support system supporting families earlier?
2. Are there sufficient resources to provide quality support services to Queensland children and families when needed?
3. Are Queensland's out-of-home care and youth justice systems upholding the rights of the children and young people they serve?
4. Are Queensland's out-of-home care and youth justice systems meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities?
5. Is the Queensland child protection and family support system a collaborative and accountable system?

OBJECTIVE ONE

Table 3 Alignment of state and national goals for the 2022–23 section 40 report.

State goals ^v	National goals ^{vi} (National framework focus areas)
Theme 1: Is the Queensland child protection and family support system supporting families earlier?	
2. Supporting Queensland families earlier	1. A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
Theme 2: Are there sufficient resources to provide quality support services to Queensland children and families when needed?	
3. Working better with Queensland families who are in contact with the child protection system	4. Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability
6. Delivering quality services to Queensland children and families through a capable, motivated, and client-focused workforce	
Theme 3: Are Queensland's out-of-home care and youth justice systems upholding the rights of the children and young people they serve?	
4. Improving care and post-care for Queensland children and young people	4. Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability
Theme 4: Are Queensland's out-of-home care and youth justice systems meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities?	
5. Meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities	2. Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems
Theme 5: Is the Queensland child protection and family support system a collaborative and accountable system?	
1. Sharing responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children	3. Improved information sharing, data development and analysis
7. Building and maintaining an accountable, transparent, and cost-effective system	

* Children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care and young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood, are a priority group for the National Framework.

Theme 1

Is the Queensland child protection and family support system supporting families earlier?

This theme relates to the following state and national goals:

State goal 2:

Supporting Queensland families earlier

National goal 1:

A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

Remaining at home safely with their family is in every child's best interests.^{vii} Providing early support to children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability can safeguard their wellbeing and development and prevent their entry to the statutory system. Starting in 2014–15, the Queensland Government invested in the establishment of:

- a community-based referral service—Family and Child Connect
- secondary family support services—Intensive Family Support services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing services for families who, without appropriate support, would be at risk of entering the statutory system.

These services provide families experiencing vulnerability with access to a range of supports to help them meet the safety and wellbeing needs of their children. These services were also expected to reduce demand on the statutory system; Queensland families can also access universal services, such as health, early childhood and school initiatives, and other services, such as drug and alcohol, and domestic and family violence services. These make an important contribution to keeping children and young people safe and preventing their entry into the child protection system. However, their impact can be hard to quantify as agencies generally do not directly measure and monitor child protection prevention outcomes.^{viii}

How does Queensland compare?

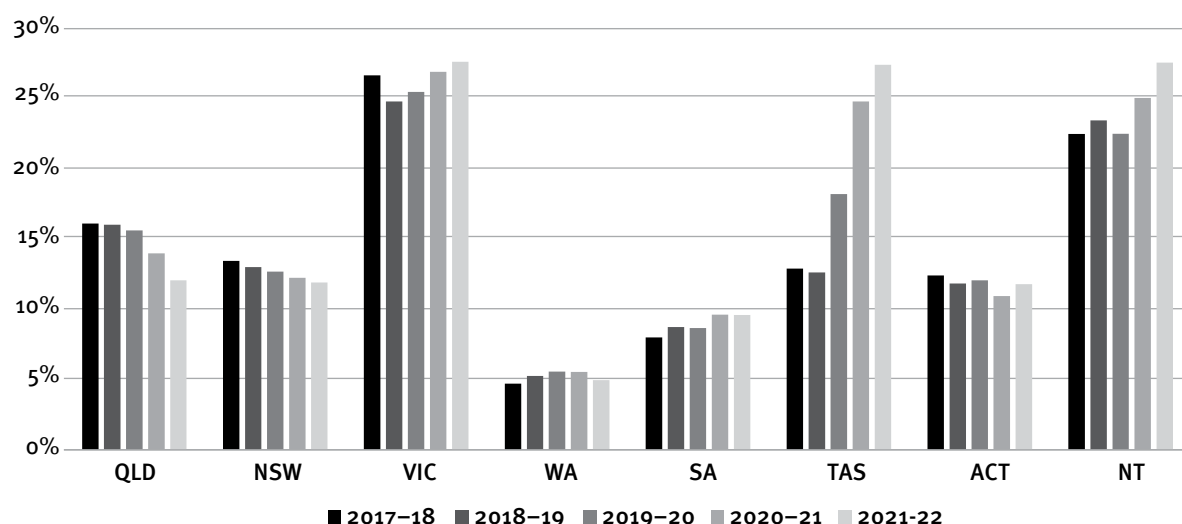
More Queensland children and young people are coming into contact with the system. In 2021–22, 14.6 per 1,000 Queensland children and young people received intensive family support services. For each of the past five years, Queensland has had the second highest rate of children receiving services behind Tasmania. In 2021–22, across Australia there was a small 0.7 per cent reduction in the total number of children who came into contact with the child protection system (a decrease from 178,813 in 2020–21 to 177,556 in 2021–22). This means around 31 per 1000 Australian children aged under 18 came into contact with the child protection system in 2021–22. By contrast the number of Queensland Children coming into contact with the child protection system continued to increase at a rate of 9.9 per cent (from 36,060 in 2020–21 to 39,627 in 2021–22) and the rate of children coming into contact in Queensland at 33.2 per 1000 was slightly higher than the national average at 31.3 per 1000.

Queensland has increased total investment in family support services but as a proportion of budget this investment is reducing and Queensland's spend per child is among the lowest in the country. In 2021–22, Queensland spent an average of \$7,260 per child on intensive family support services—lower than most other jurisdictions except Western Australia (\$6,600 per child) and Tasmania (\$4,385 per child). Since 2017–18, Queensland's average expenditure per child on intensive family support services has ranged between \$6,444 and \$7,725.

Queensland's investment in family support and intensive family support increased by 12.5 per cent

from 2017-18 to 2021-22.^{ix} The 2023-24 Queensland Budget includes \$48.5 million over three years from 2024-25 and \$16.2 million ongoing from 2027-28, with a further \$17.1 million over three years from 2024-25 and \$5.8 million ongoing being internally met for the delivery of local, community-based Family and Child Connect services. It also included an additional \$26.6 million over four years and \$10.3 million ongoing, with a further \$1.5 million internally sourced to expand the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services. Acknowledging this additional expenditure, Figure 2 presents data on the proportion of child protection services funding spent on intensive family support and family support services. It shows that on average since 2017-18 around 15 per cent of Queensland's expenditure has been allocated to these services. Only the Northern Territory, Victoria and Tasmania have consistently allocated a greater proportion of expenditure on these services than Queensland, however Queensland's investment is falling to 12 per cent and has the sharpest decline over five years.

Figure 2: A comparison across Australian jurisdictions of the percentage of government real recurrent expenditure on intensive family support and family support services as a percentage of all child protection services (FY2018-FY2022).



Source: Productivity Commission, 2023 Table 16A.8^{x 7}

What is working well or improving?

Families are proactively seeking help and trusting the system. One in six referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and Family and Child Connect services were initiated by the families themselves, which indicates that families are directly seeking help and trust these services.^{xi} QFCC's survey of parents involved in the system indicated that 45 per cent of respondents agreed (26 per cent agreed, and 18 per cent strongly agreed) that they received family support services that helped their family.

The Family and Child Connect, Intensive Family Support and Family Wellbeing services received a combined 41,476 referrals in 2021-22. Overall, this was a similar level of referrals compared to previous year's activity. In 2021-22, referrals to the Family Wellbeing Service were above the five-year average (2018-2022), while referrals were slightly below the five-year average for the Family and Child Connect and Intensive Family Support services:

- 4,899 referrals to Family Wellbeing Services, which was 14.6 per cent above average^{xii}
- 30,417 enquiries to Family and Child Connect services, which was 3.2 per cent below average^{xiii}

⁷ Time series financial data are adjusted to 2021-22 dollars (i.e., 2021-22=100) using the General Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GGFCE) chain price deflator.

- 6,160 referrals to Intensive Family Support services, which was 1.7 per cent below average^{xiv}

There is evidence that services are improving outcomes for children and families. Queensland families who attended a family support service in 2021–22 and whose cases were closed with ‘all or the majority of their needs met’ were less likely to have a notification within six months than families who did not receive a service (see Table 4).^{xv}

Table 4: Percentage of children whose case was closed with ‘all or the majority of their needs met’ who had a subsequent Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services’ notification within 6 months, as at 30 June 2022.

	Service		
	Child Concern Report	Intensive Family Support	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Service
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	20.4%	16.1%	13.2%
Non-Indigenous children	12.2%	10.7%	4.8%

Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2023

What needs further improvement?

Our understanding of the rates and frequency of child maltreatment needs further improvement. The groundbreaking Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) found that the current rates of child abuse and neglect exceed the rates found by Australia’s child protection systems. For all Australian’s the research revealed that as children:

- 32 per cent experienced physical abuse
- 28 per cent experienced sexual abuse
- 30 per cent experienced emotional abuse
- nine per cent experienced neglect and
- 40 per cent experienced exposure to domestic violence.

The ACMS report suggests that children and young people may be experiencing higher rates of abuse, and different types of abuse, than what is currently being identified. In 2021–22, Queensland Child Safety reported that for all substantiations, the single most serious abuses assessed in each case were: emotional abuse (49 per cent); neglect (26 per cent); physical abuse (16 per cent); and sexual abuse (7 per cent). Domestic violence is not a distinct reported category, and the reported rates of abuse vary considerably from those collected by the ACMS.

More specifically, the rate of child abuse substantiations per total population for each of the abuse categories collected by child safety across Australia are each under one per cent of all children (see Child Protection Australia Report, Table S3.14). While there are clear differences in the definitions and counting rules – including that child safety is only responsible for taking action when a parent causes significant harm – the distinction between the rates of prevalence of abuse – particularly the high rate of child sexual abuse and low prevalence of neglect - requires much consideration by government policy makers focused on protecting children.

The capacity of the family support system is limited. Our review of the use of Interventions with Parental Agreement showed that long waitlists and lack of available services were impacting on families’ ability to address and recover from risks. Stakeholders reported that specific services of concern include community-based mental health services, affordable housing in regional and remote areas, and programs for male perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Only 8.2 per cent of respondents to the QFCC’s 2023 survey of frontline workers agreed there is sufficient capacity within the secondary support service system to meet demand and less than one-quarter (21.3 per cent) agreed that the services had reduced tertiary system demand. The results were relatively unchanged from our 2022 survey.

Theme 2

Are there sufficient resources to provide quality support services to Queensland children and families when needed?

This theme relates to the following state and national goals:

State goal 3:

Working better with Queensland families who are in contact with the child protection system.

National goal 4:

Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability.

State goal 6:

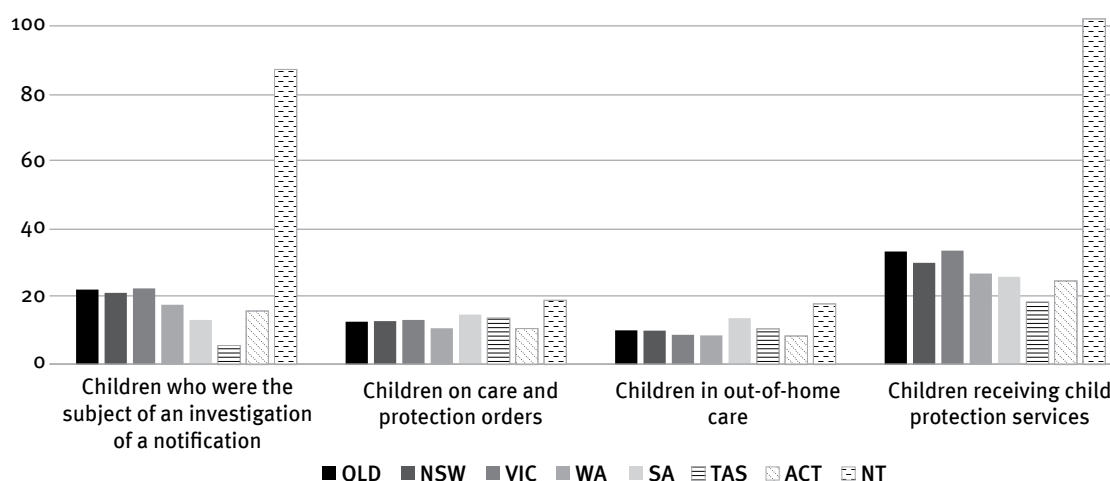
Delivering quality services to Queensland children and families through a capable, motivated and client-focused workforce.

In Queensland, the child protection and family support system responds to concerns about the care and protection of children who have been, or are at risk of, being abused, neglected or exploited by their family. The child protection and family support system consists of both secondary and statutory approaches, which are provided based on the level of need, risk and harm. Children and their families may receive support services to keep children safe, or be subject to investigations.

How does Queensland compare?

During 2021–22, 177,556 children received child protection services in Australia, including 39,626 Queensland children and young people (a 9.9 per cent increase over the 36,060 figure in 2020–21). Queensland's rate in 2021–22 of children and young people who were the subject of an investigation of a notification is slightly above the national average (22 per 1,000 in QLD vs 21 per 1,000 nationally)^{xvi}

Figure 3: A comparison across Australian jurisdictions of the rate per 1,000 children and young people receiving child protection services (2021–2022).



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023 Table 2.2^{xvii}

While Queensland has seen increases in the total number of children entering and in care the State does not have a high rate in comparison to Australia. Rates of children and young people in out-of-home care have risen consistently in Queensland and South Australia since 2017–18, while Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania have seen slight decreases since 2020–21. Rates have consistently decreased in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory since 2017–18.^{xviii}

What is working well or improving?

Queensland continues to have a strong and resilient workforce committed to the safety of children The importance of the child protection and family support workforce cannot be understated.^{xix} Many of the decisions workers need to make involving vulnerable children, young people and their families involve extremely complex situations with multiple stakeholders. The decisions can be ethically fraught and emotionally challenging, demanding a high level of knowledge and skill.^{xx} This workforce includes:

- 1,844 child safety case workers employed by Child Safety as at 31 March 2023^{xxi}
- 5,854 foster and kinship carer families as at 31 March 2023^{xxii}
- one dedicated student protection principal advisor in each of the seven Department of Education regions.^{xxiii}

Respondents to the QFCC's 2023 survey of frontline workers agreed their work serves an important purpose (96.3 per cent), leads to positive change (74.8 per cent), and gives them a sense of satisfaction (76 per cent).^{xxiv}

The effectiveness of child safety interventions is improving. Since 2017–18, there has been a 15.4 per cent increase in the number of children and young people who did not experience subsequent substantiations after their initial substantiation (Table 5). This means child safety actions are protecting safety outcomes for the children they work with.

Table 5: Number (and per cent) of individual children and young people who did not experience a further substantiation after their first substantiation (FY2018–2022).

	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	Change since 2017–18	Change since 2020–21
No substantiation after first substantiation (within 12 months)	5460 (82.2%)	5422 (81.5%)	5830 (82.7%)	6277 (84.3%)	6300 (85.6%)	15.4% increase	0.4% increase

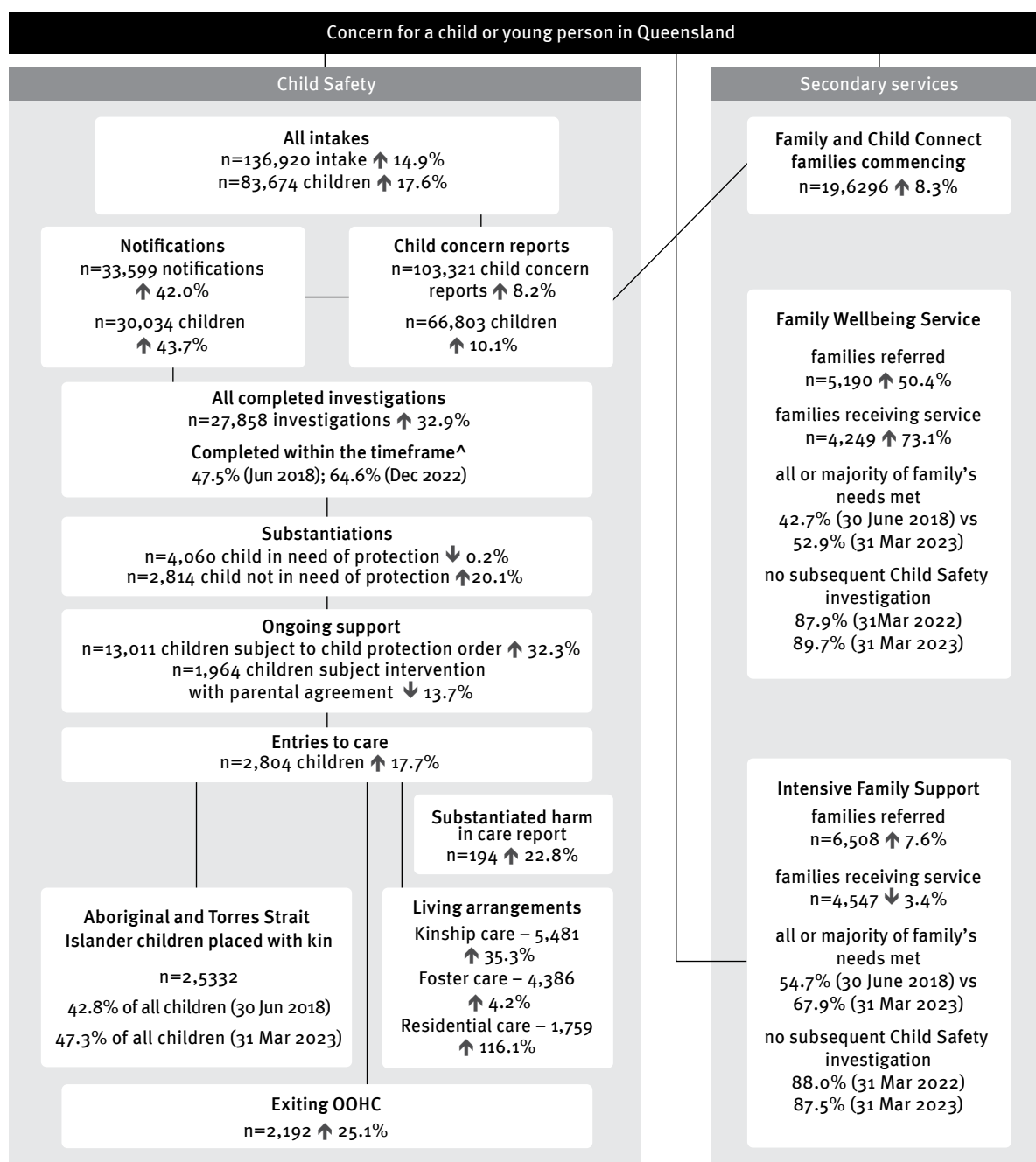
Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2023

Despite persistent increasing demand, the number of children entering the statutory system is at its lowest level in four years.

Figure 4 describes the demand pressures in the Queensland child protection and family support system for the 12 months ending 31 March 2023.

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Figure 4: Flow chart with relevant available data for various points of the child protection and family support system—12 months ending 31 March 2023 noting percentage change from 12 months ending 30 June 2018.



Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2023

*Data notes: data is for the year ending March 2023 (12 months of data). Unless otherwise stated, percentage change reference point (where relevant) is 12 months ending 30 June 2018. Family and Child Connect services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and Intensive Family Support services were implemented from 2017, with new services rolled out over time.

[^] Note: From 1 September 2019, the prescribed timeframe for completing an investigation and assessment changed from 60 calendar days to 100 calendar days.

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Whilst the figures show increased demand in intakes, notifications, and investigations there is not a corresponding increase in substantiations or children entering care. Between 2018-19 and 2021-22, there has been a 3.4 per cent decrease in the number of children entering out-of-home care. Over the last year, the number entering out-of-home care has decreased by 8.6 per cent and the number of children subject to a substantiation has decreased by 3.8 per cent (see Table 6).

Table 6: Number of individual children and young people subject to Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services interventions during the financial years (FY2018–2021).

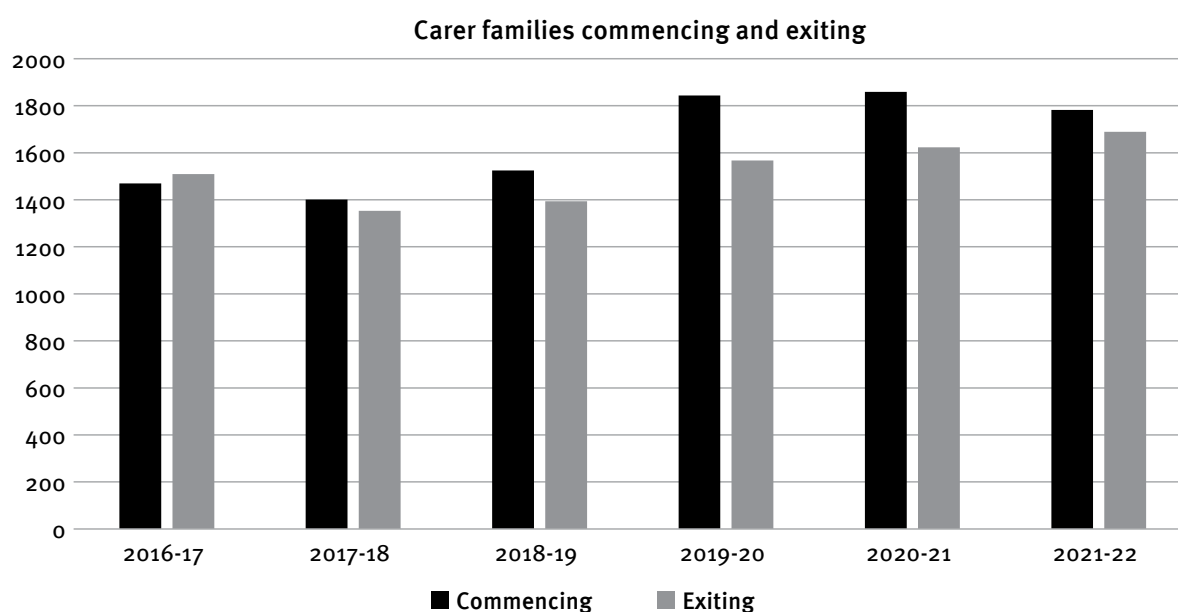
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	3 year trend	Change since last year
Notifications	22,767	23,273	25,233	28,587	25.6% increase	13.3% increase
Substantiations	6063	6551	6408	6249	3.1% increase	2.5% decrease
Entering out-of-home care	2807	3117	2958	2705	3.6% decrease	8.6% decrease
In out-of-home care	9647	10527	11065	11323	17.4% increase	2.3% increase
Exiting out-of-home care	1786	1803	2022	2096	17.4% increase	3.7% increase
Intervention with parental agreement	2095	1988	1863	2043	2.5% decrease	9.7% increase

Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2023^{xxv}

What needs further improvement?

The number of carer families is not increasing at the rate of demand. In 2021–22, there were 5,967 carer families, a 1.8 per cent increase over 2020–21 however, while the number of kinship and foster carer families has slightly increased, it has not matched the growth in children needing care, and there was a noticeable decline in the number of provisionally approved carers over the last three years. Consistent with previous years, the modest overall increases have not kept pace with the number of children and young people in out-of-home care.^{xxvi} There has also been a steady increase in the number of carer families exiting (Figure 5).

Figure 5 Number of carer families commencing and exiting (FY17-22).



Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2023

During Queensland Foster and Kinship Care's 2021-22 carer exit interviews, 105 carer respondents gave the following reasons for discontinuing as a foster/kinship carer: 35 per cent cited a perceived lack of support and services from the Department of Child Safety; 23 per cent cited carer or family reasons including difficult interactions with birth parents or health reasons; and 15 per cent cited child related reasons including placements ending and child behavioural difficulties.

There is remarkable effort going into recruiting 1782 new carer families over 12 months, however the real benefit is minimised when 1689 carer households leave the system each year. This is close to a 30 per cent turnover in foster carers per annum.

Community confidence in the child protection system is fragile. In 2023, QFCC's annual Community Perceptions survey 3,154 respondents were asked if they had confidence and trust in the Queensland child protection system, with 56 per cent of respondents indicating they agreed (48 per cent agreed and eight per cent strongly agreed). This is a 6.67 percent points decrease from the survey results in 2022.

While the average caseload of a child safety officer in Queensland has decreased, the child protection and family support workforce are feeling strained. On average, caseloads have decreased to 15.8 per officer for the year ending 31 March 2023^{8xxvii,xxviii} however, the results from QFCC's 2023 survey of frontline workers indicates that workload demands have worsened year-on-year. Only 46.6 per cent agreed their workload was manageable (compared to 57 per cent in our 2022 survey); 48.5 per cent agreed they received the right amount of professional supervision to do their job well (down from 63 per cent in 2022); and 74.6 per cent agreed they received support from their colleagues/peers to do their job well (down from 87 per cent).^{xxx} As part of our study of the workforce, Department of Child Safety staff told us that reasons for the increased workload include the increased complexity of family situations, and implementation of new processes and systems.^{xxx} The Child Death Review

8 Note: From 30 June 2021 onward the caseload calculation methodology changed to reflect the updated Workload Management Policy for child safety officers working with children and young people receiving ongoing support. As such data is not comparable to previous years data.

Board Annual Report 2021–22 made findings about the need for workforce reform in Queensland. It observed that agencies and services are competing for staff and the issue is compounded by disparities in remuneration, incentives and leave provisions across government and non-government sectors. This results in some sectors consistently losing trained staff to other areas. In many cases, the Board and agencies attributed oversights or critical practice errors to workforce and resourcing challenges. Specifically, the cycle of high workloads and staff vacancies impacted quality of services, information-sharing, and timeliness and consistency of interventions. These issues were amplified in First Nations, rural and remote communities due to additional geographic and contextual barriers and reliance on service models unsuited to local needs. The Board made two recommendations on the workforce issue for government consideration.

There is visible tension in the system between the need to close cases and appropriately sighting and safeguarding children during investigations. In 2021–22, 2,619 investigations were finalised with an investigation outcome of ‘other’, a 325.85 per cent increase from 2020–21 in which 615 investigations were closed with an outcome of ‘other’. This increase follows the introduction of a process in October 2021 (revised in October 2022) allowing pending investigations to be closed after 100 days if no new or significant information had been received. In these cases, the child is not sighted. While there was variation across Queensland regions, on average it was taking between two and nine weeks to sight a child when a notification was commenced by information only.^{xxxI} At 31 March 2023, almost half (45 per cent) of notifications were commenced by information gathering.^{xxxII} In these cases, the child is not sighted.

Fewer children and young people in out-of-home care have current case plans. The rate of children and young people with a case plan that is current has declined from 90.4 per cent in 2017–18 to 85 per cent in 2021–22.^{xxxIII} In our review of Permanent Care Orders we received advice that the lack of current case plans was contributing to long court delays that impacted on stability and certainty for children in care.

Too many families are cycling through the child protection system and the number of children in care continues to grow. There are a higher number of children and young people entering the out-of-home care system each year than exiting, resulting in the total number of children living in out-of-home care increasing by 17.4 per cent between 2017–18 and 2021–22. Since 2017–18, there has been an increase in the number and the rate of children and young people in out-of-home care.^{xxxIV} Additionally, of the 39,626 Queensland children and young people that received a child protection service in 2021–22, 26,621 (67.2 per cent) had received a service in a prior year.^{xxxV}

Theme 3

Are Queensland's out-of-home care and youth justice systems upholding the rights of the children and young people they serve?

This theme relates to the following state and national goals:

State goal 4:

Improving care and post-care for Queensland children and young people.

National goal 4:

Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability.

* Children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care and young people leaving out-of-home care and transitioning to adulthood, are a priority group for the National Framework.

When children are not able to remain safely at home, placing them in home-based care is considered to be in their best interests.^{xxxvi} Out-of-home care that is safe and stable can help children and young people recover from experiences of maltreatment. Many young people with experience in care go on to complete higher education, start families and have successful careers. Overall, however, children and young people in care are more likely to experience homelessness, criminal justice interventions, unemployment, worse physical and mental health, and educational outcomes, compared to children and young people without a care experience.^{xxxvii, xxxviii, xxxix, xl}

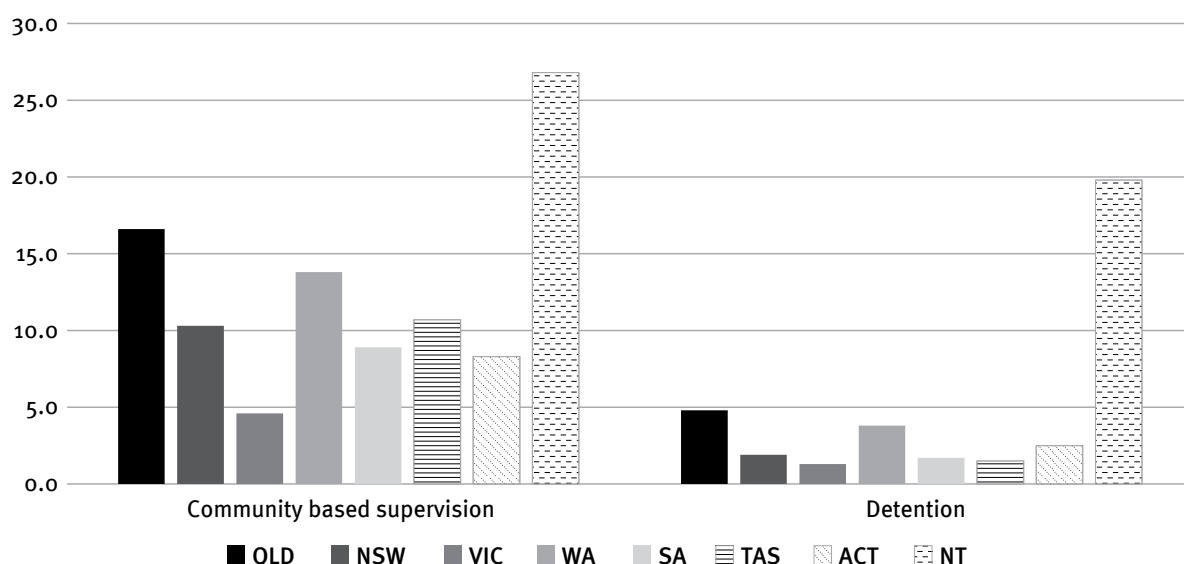
Likewise, when a child engages in criminal behaviour the youth justice system is intended to keep the community safe while addressing the underlying causes of the behaviour to prevent future reoffending. The youth justice system is designed to uphold and protect community safety by responding to the behaviours in young people that are anti-social and criminal. It spans from early intervention to detention. The *Youth Justice Act 1992* recognises the importance of the provision of services designed to rehabilitate and reintegrate children and young people who commit offences. Young people exposed to the youth justice system are too often treated as individuals, yet we know that unaddressed, significant family adversity remains a precursor to youth justice exposure. Consequently, in our work we also consider the families that are exposed to the youth justice system.

How does Queensland compare?

Queensland locks up more children than any other State and leads the nation for nights spent in custody. During 2021–22, Queensland had the second highest rate of young people in youth justice custody on an average day (4.8 per 10,000) and the second highest rate of young people under community-based supervision on an average day (16.6 per 10,000) behind the Northern Territory (Figure 6).^{xli} On an average day in 2022, 267 Queensland young people aged 10–17 years were in youth justice custody, 256 were in a youth detention centre and 227 spent time in a youth detention centre on unsentenced detention.^{xlii}

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Figure 6: A comparison across Australian jurisdictions of the rate of young people aged 10–17 per 10,000 in community-based supervision and youth justice detention (2021–22).



Source: Productivity Commission, 2023 Table 17A.1^{XLIII}

During 2021-22, Queensland children spent the most nights in custody (100,425 total), followed by 68,172 total custody nights in New South Wales and 44,129 total custody nights in Victoria. As such, more than a third of the national nights in custody were served by Queensland children.^{XLIV} In June 2021, 88 per cent of children and young people in Queensland detention centres were unsentenced. This is 16 per cent higher than the national average rate.^{XLV} In 2022, the number of young people in unsentenced custody in Queensland increased by 4.1 per cent from the year prior and increased by 27.5 per cent since 2018 (see Table 7).^{XLVI} Of the young people completing a period of unsentenced custody in 2021–22, 60 per cent completed a period of 30 nights or longer (62.0 per cent for First Nations young people and 56 per cent for non-Indigenous young people).^{XLVII}

Table 7: Number (and rate per 10,000) of children and young people within the Queensland youth justice system on an average day (2018-2022).

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Change since 2018	Change since 2021
Community-based supervision	1278 (24.7)	1187 (22.4)	949 (17.6)	913 (16.5)	877 (15.9)	31.4% decrease	3.9% decrease
Youth justice custody	224 (4.3)	212 (4.0)	185 (3.5)	253 (4.6)	267 (4.8)	5.4% increase	5.5% increase
Youth detention centre	209 (4.0)	185 (3.5)	182 (3.4)	249 (4.5)	256 (4.6)	22.5% increase	2.8% increase
Youth detention centre on unsentenced detention	178 (3.4)	155 (2.9)	163 (3.0)	218 (3.9)	227 (4.1)	27.5% increase	4.1% increase

Source: Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training^{XLVIII}

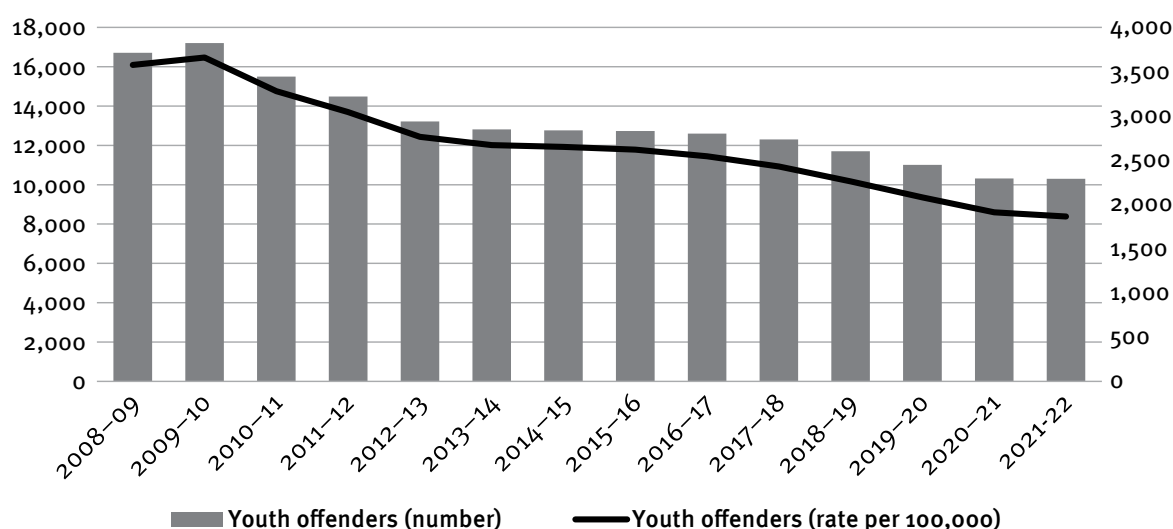
Queensland children and young people in out-of-home care experience more placements than children in many other states. In 2021–22, across all Australian jurisdictions, Queensland had the fourth lowest percentage of children and young people on a child protection order and exiting care after 12 months or more in care with only one or two placements (49.3 per cent). The Australian Capital Territory had the greatest proportion of children and young people on a care and protection order and exiting care after 12 months or more in care with only one or two placements (64.9 per cent).^{XLIX}

What is working well or improving?

Queensland has a higher rate of children exiting out-of-home care successfully to a permanency arrangement compared to most other jurisdictions. In 2020–21, rates of children living in out-of-home care who exited on a permanent arrangement and did not return within 12 months were highest for Victoria (35.4 per cent), followed by South Australia (14.5 per cent) and Queensland (12.1 per cent).^L

The rate of youth offending in Queensland has been steadily decreasing since 2008. Between 2008–09 and 2021–22, the number of young offenders proceeded against by police aged 10–17 years decreased from 16,709 to 10,304. The rate per 100,000 persons aged 10–17 years dropped from 3,575.8 to 1,863 (see Figure 7).^{LI}

Figure 7: A comparison of the number of youth offenders aged 10–17 years and the rate per 100,000 persons aged 10–17 years (FY2008–2021).



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022^{LII}

While the use of diversionary practices in Queensland has increased, the use of detention is increasing at higher rate. Over the past five years, there has been an increase in the number and rate of children and young people subject to youth justice custody, and a decrease in community-based supervision. Between 2017–18 and 2021–22, the rate of young people in youth justice custody on an average day increased from 4.3 to 4.8 per 10,000 young people aged 10–17.^{LIII} The rate of young people subject to community-based supervision fell from 24.7 to 15.9 per 10,000 young people aged 10–17.^{LIV}

Between 2018–19 and 2021–22, the number of cautions administered increased from 12,442 to 14,589 (the number was higher in 2019–20 at 15,428 cautions) and restorative justice conferences for young offenders increased from 1,866 to 2,249.^{LV} This comes as the Queensland Government announced it is providing increased funding of \$29.4 million over four years and \$7.4 million per annum ongoing to provide location specific diversionary responses to youth crime and young people engaging in anti-social behaviour. The government has also allocated:

- \$64 million over three years for policing responses including high visibility patrols and specialist youth crime rapid response squads
- \$15 million over two years to empower communities to develop local solutions to youth crime issues
- \$1.2 million over three years to deliver a fast-track sentencing pilot in four locations for 18 months to address delays in court proceedings through proactive case management of matters.

Most children and young people reported they feel cared for, safe and secure and happy living in out-of-home care. 78 per cent of children and young people feel people where they live now care about them, 88 per cent feel safe and secure, 94 per cent have someone in their life they trust, and 70 per cent feel happy in care.^{LV}

The My Life in Care Survey highlights the voices and lived experiences of hundreds of young people in care in Queensland. The significant majority of respondents to the survey (69.9%) indicated they are in kinship or foster care placements, and that while they had felt sad (55.1%) or scared (57.1%) coming into care, they now felt more relaxed (54.8%), safe (64%) and happy (69.9%). Of those who were told what to expect coming into care (29%), almost all (91%) had found it helpful in preparing themselves. This demonstration of adaptability indicates that equipping young people with direct, clear and age-appropriate guidance can be a powerful resource for tackling substantial challenges.

Services are in place to support children and young people in out-of-home care who raise concerns and Queensland had the second lowest rate of children in care who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse. In 2021–22, Queensland reported a rate of 1.2 per cent of children in care who were subject of a substantiation of sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect; only behind Tasmania at 0.8 per cent. New South Wales had the greatest proportion of children in care who were the subject of a substantiation of abuse (4.8 per cent).^{LVII} Between 2017–18 and 2021–22, the proportion of children and young people with substantiated harm reports remained around two per cent. In 2021–22, 167 children and young people in out-of-home care experienced harm.^{LVIII} Since November 2018, the Queensland Government has been a participating institution in the National Redress Scheme (the Scheme). In June 2022, the Commonwealth Government, who lead the Scheme, confirmed it had provided payments to applicants totalling more than \$748 million through the Scheme for historical institutional child sexual abuse. In the same period, the Queensland Government had linked 156 people, who had accepted an offer of redress through the Commonwealth, with access to counselling and psychological care services.^{LIX} In 2021–22, the Office of the Public Guardian conducted 30,992 visits to 10,622 children and young people. They raised 15,159 issues on behalf of children and young people at visitable locations and provided child advocate support to 266 children and young people.^{LX} In October 2022, new provisions commenced in the Act to make it mandatory for foster and kinship carers to report to Child Safety if they reasonably suspect a child in care has suffered, is suffering, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering significant harm caused by physical or sexual abuse.^{LXI} The majority of frontline workers who responded to our 2023 workforce survey^{LXII} agreed that within their organisation:

- the views of children and young people are listened to and valued (69.9 per cent)
- decisions are made in children's and young people's best interests (73.9 per cent).

Support to children and young people leaving out-of-home care has been extended. The government has announced it will support the children and young people who exit care each year for longer, recognising their continuing responsibility to care for children who have been removed from their parents. Approximately 600 young people leaving care each year will be supported in their transition to adulthood through a range of new measures commencing in 2023–24, including continuing the carers allowance for 19–21-year-olds remaining at home and providing financial support and mentoring for young people aged 18–21 leaving non-family-based care.^{LXIII}

Young people leaving out-of-home care are finding employment. Rates of young people who enter employment after school are similar among those living in out-of-home care (29.7 per cent) and the wider Queensland population (30 per cent). However, fewer young people living in out-of-home care (29.7 per cent) are entering further study than the wider population (60.6 per cent).^{LXIV}

The number of children and young people in care receiving NDIS support is increasing. Many children and young people in contact with Child Safety receive NDIS support. As at 30 June 2022, 2,798 Queensland children and young people in out-of-home care had a disability (29.0 per cent).^{LXV} In addition, 2,262 children and young people subject to ongoing intervention (either a child protection order or intervention with parental agreement) had an NDIS support plan.^{LXVI}

What needs further improvement?

The number of children and young people on child protection orders living in residential care almost doubled. More than 15 per cent of all children in care are living in residential care. This form of care is the least preferred of all care types – particularly because it does not provide a strong home like environment. Between 2017–18 and 2021–22 there has been a 94.3 per cent increase (from 814 to 1,582 children and young people) living in residential care.^{LXVII} Over the last five years since 2022, the number of 0 to 4-year-olds in residential care has increased 88.9 per cent and the number of 5 to 9-year-olds increased by 67.9 per cent. The number of 0 to 9-year-olds has increased by 20.9 per cent over the 12 months ending 2021–22.

The QFCC is now overseeing a Departmental review of the Residential Care system.

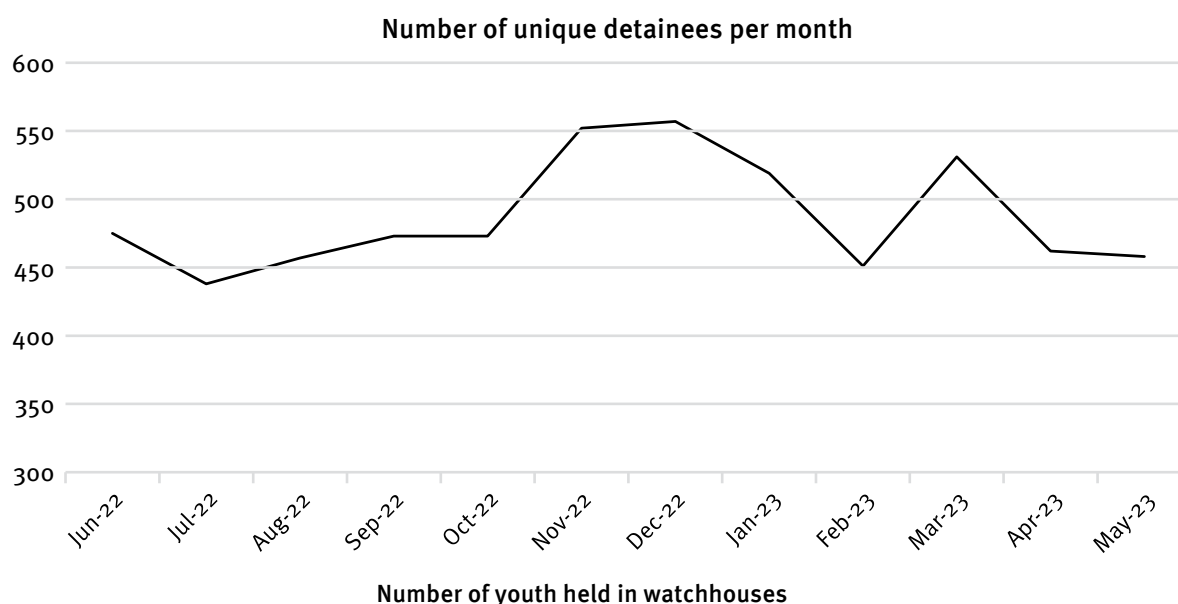
Queensland has a lower percentage of children and young people in out-of-home care meeting national reading standards compared to other reporting jurisdictions. Of the three jurisdictions that provided data in 2021, the percentage of year five children subject to guardianship/custody orders who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for reading were highest for Western Australia (79.8 per cent), followed by South Australia (74.5 per cent) and Queensland (72.3 per cent).^{LXVIII} The percentage of children and young people with a current education support plan had increased from 55.6 per cent in 2016–17 to 80.9 per cent in 2020–21, but has decreased to 72.8 per cent in 2021–22.^{LXIX}

Our model of youth detention is not effectively rehabilitating offenders. 56.8 per cent of young people, aged 10–16 years at the time of release from sentenced supervision, returned to sentenced supervision within 12 months.^{LXX} Within Queensland's small group of young offenders, young people categorised as serious repeat offenders accounted for 17 per cent of young people convicted and 48 per cent of the charges.^{LXXI} These young people are having a significant impact on their community and multiple experiences of detention does not appear to be an effective solution. Data released in 2022 indicates that for the 12-month period ending 30 June 2021, 585 distinct young people completed a detention period in Brisbane Youth Detention Centre (BYDC). Of those young people, 92 per cent were alleged to have committed another offence in the 12 months following their release.^{LXXII} For the 12-month period ending 30 June 2021, 19 distinct young people completed a detention period in West Moreton Youth Detention Centre (WMDYC). Of those, 84 per cent were alleged to have committed another offence in the 12 months following their release. For the 12-month period ending 30 June 2021, 310 distinct young people completed a detention period in Cleveland Youth Detention Centre (CYDC). Of those, 96 per cent were alleged to have committed another offence in the 12 months following their release.^{LXXIII}

Less than half of parents surveyed felt recognised and treated fairly by Child Safety. The Charter of Rights for parents was implemented in June 2022, developed with the insight of parents and kin through their lived experience. The QFCC collaborated with the Family Inclusion Network to survey parents about their experiences of the child protection system. The survey revealed that only 34 per cent of parents of children in out-of-home care were aware of the Charter.^{LXXIV} The survey also indicated that 45 per cent of respondents agreed (30 per cent agreed, and 15 per cent strongly agreed) that they felt recognised and respected by the child protection system, and 47 per cent of respondents agreed (30 per cent agreed, and 17 per cent strongly agreed) that they were treated fairly by the child protection system. The survey is the first of its kind conducted in Queensland and there is no national comparison. The 2023 results provide a baseline for further improvement.

More children and young people are being held in watchhouses for longer periods. During 2021-22, there were 7,001 admissions of children to watch houses, with 1,356 admissions resulting in children spending more than one day in the watch house.^{LXXV} Comparatively, in 2017-18, there were 1,267 admissions to a watch house with 515 children spending more than one day in a watch house.^{LXXVI} Over this period, total admissions to watch houses increased by 452 per cent and children being held in a watch house for more than one day increased by 163 per cent. The longest period of time a juvenile was held in a watch house in the last 12 months was 39 days (936 hours).^{LXXVII}

Figure 8: Monthly unique count of juveniles held in Queensland watchhouses, June 2022 to May 2023.



Source: Queensland Parliament, 2023^{LXXVIII}

School suspension rates are markedly higher for children and young people living in out-of-home care. The rate of student disciplinary absences in 2022 was 7.3 per cent among children and young people not in care, whereas the rate was 24.5 per cent among children and young people living in out-of-home care.^{LXXIX} Furthermore, in 2022, in every year level, students in out-of-home care were less likely to be meeting national standards than other Queensland students. The difference for out-of-home care students was greatest in writing—national standards were met by only 81.2 per cent of year three students, 61.4 per cent of year five students, 53.3 per cent of year seven students, and 44.6 per cent of year nine students.^{LXXX}

Unaddressed adversity remains a precursor to youth justice exposure. In 2021–22, 10 to 17-year-olds from the lowest socio-economic areas were five times more likely to be under youth justice supervision than those from the highest socio-economic areas.^{LXXXI} In 2022, a total of 1,605 young offenders were surveyed in the Youth Justice Census. Of these, it is estimated that:

- 45 per cent had disengaged from education, training or employment
- 53 per cent had experienced or been impacted by domestic and family violence
- 30 per cent had been living in unstable and/or unsuitable accommodation
- 27 per cent had at least one parent who spent time in adult custody
- 19 per cent had an active child protection order
- 27 per cent had a disability (diagnosed or suspected), including 17 per cent who had a cognitive or intellectual disability
- 33 per cent had at least one mental health and/or behavioural disorder (diagnosed or suspected).^{LXXXII}

Frontline child safety workers express concern that the system is not meeting the needs of children and young people. Across all QFCC surveys of frontline workers, the majority of respondents consistently disagreed with the notion that the child protection and family support system met the needs of children, young people, and families. This trend has continued in our most recent survey in 2023, with 64.7 per cent disagreeing, compared with 14.4 per cent agreeing.^{LXXXIII}

Theme 4

Are Queensland's out-of-home care and youth justice systems meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities?

This theme relates to the following state and national goals:

State goal 5:

Meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities.

National goal 5:

Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems.

The theme also examines Queensland's progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

First Nations children, young people and families continue to be disproportionately represented in statutory child protection and youth justice systems in Queensland and across Australia. We are committed to identifying and highlighting the dynamics and drivers of this over-representation, and helping others understand and address the causes.

How does Queensland compare?

Over the past three years, the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are over-represented in out-of-home care has worsened in Queensland and every Australian state, with the exception of the territories.^{LXXXIV} The disproportionality ratio⁹ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland was 5.6 in 2021–22. This means there were 5.6 times more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care than would be expected given the proportion of First Nations children and young people in the state's population. Table 8 shows that Queensland's disproportionality ratio was higher than Tasmania (3.6) and the Northern Territory (2.2) but lower than all other states and the ACT. In every state, the disproportionality ratio has increased since 2017–18, while in the Northern Territory it has remained consistent, and in the Australian Capital Territory it has marginally dropped¹⁰.

Table 8: Disproportionality ratios for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged 0–17 years in out-of-home care across Australian jurisdictions (FY2017–2021).

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
2021-22	6.8	16.0	5.6	8.7	7.8	3.6	10.0	2.2
2020-21	6.7	16.0	5.5	8.6	7.6	3.6	9.4	2.2
2019-20	6.5	15.8	5.4	8.5	7.6	3.4	10.0	2.1
2018-19	6.3	15.0	5.4	8.1	7.3	3.3	9.4	2.2
2017-18	6.2	14.5	5.1	8.2	6.9	3.0	10.3	2.2

Source: Productivity Commission, 2023 Table 16A.9^{LXXXV}

⁹ Disproportionality refers to when representation of a particular group is higher than it should be by statistical standards. If the cohort's representation is proportionate to their representation in the target population, the disproportionality ratio will equal 1.0.

¹⁰ From 2018–19 the scope of out-of-home care changed. This means that in some jurisdictions, disproportionality ratios for out-of-home care from 2018–19 are not comparable with data for previous years.

Disproportionate representation does not occur in isolation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's experiences within the child protection system are also affected by their interactions with other systems and services. Australia's National Agreement on Closing the Gap outlines targets to reduce inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a target date of 2031.^{LXXXVI} Reducing disproportionate representation in child protection is one of the agreement's 17 socio-economic outcome areas. Other targets relate to early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, housing, safe communities, and disproportionate representation in youth justice.^{LXXXVII}

What is working well or improving?

More first nations children are being placed permanently with their kin and the legal definition of kin has been amended. The change allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to be placed with people regarded as kin if they have a legitimate cultural connection to the child.^{LXXXVIII} In 2021–22, there was a marked increase in the use of Permanent Care Orders (PCOs) for First Nations children and young people—rising from three in 2018–19 to 28 in 2021–22. The QFCC recently reviewed the use of PCOs for First Nations children and young people. The results indicated that 100 per cent of PCOs for First Nations children and young people were made to kin in 2021–22 and 26 of the 28 PCOs were made to First Nations kin. We found that the majority of children and young people (85 per cent) lived with their guardians for over two years prior to the order being made and a quarter lived with their guardian for over five years. PCOs in these cases provided continuation of relational and placement stability for the child. Almost 50 per cent of PCOs in 2021–22 were finalised within three months, a significant achievement for reaching timely permanency for children and young people with kin and stopping statutory involvement as quickly as possible. However, the data showed there were significant delays in some courts finalising PCOs and regional variations.

There has been an increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people living in out-of-home care who are placed with kin. It is now more likely that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child will be placed with kin or with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. As at 30 June 2022, 2,332 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care were placed in kinship care (45.6 per cent), 2,079 in foster care (40.6 per cent) and 704 in residential care (13.8 per cent). Our Principle Focus snapshots identified that the number of children and young people being placed with kin increased by more than seven per cent during 2021–2. This may be attributed to the establishment of dedicated Kinship Care teams in most regions, although regions have identified difficulty engaging kinship carers due to a fear of Child Safety and complicated processes, such as blue card applications.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are reunified with their families, it is almost always successful. While the numbers of reunifications are low, it has been consistent over time—166 in 2017–18, 177 in 2018–19, 142 in 2019–20 and 172 in 2020–21.^{LXXXIX} In 2021–22, 214 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were reunified with their families and 193 (90.2 per cent) did not return to care within 12 months.^{XC}

We spoke with regional Child Safety staff and community-controlled organisations across two communities in the Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland region who are seeing significant improvements in the number of children and young people safely reunified with their families. This region accounts for 20 per cent (48 children) of all children and young people reunified with their families in Queensland.

There have been improvements in infant mortality, readiness for school, housing and use of police diversions. According to the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), between 2009 and 2021 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland who were developmentally on track to start school had risen from 21.5 per cent to 33.8 per cent. In 2021, this compared with 53.2 per cent of non-Indigenous children in Queensland. This gap has remained consistent across the past five AEDC censuses.^{XCI} The annual rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infant deaths has been decreasing, on average, by 4.0 per cent per year since 2009 compared with 2.3 per cent reduction for non-

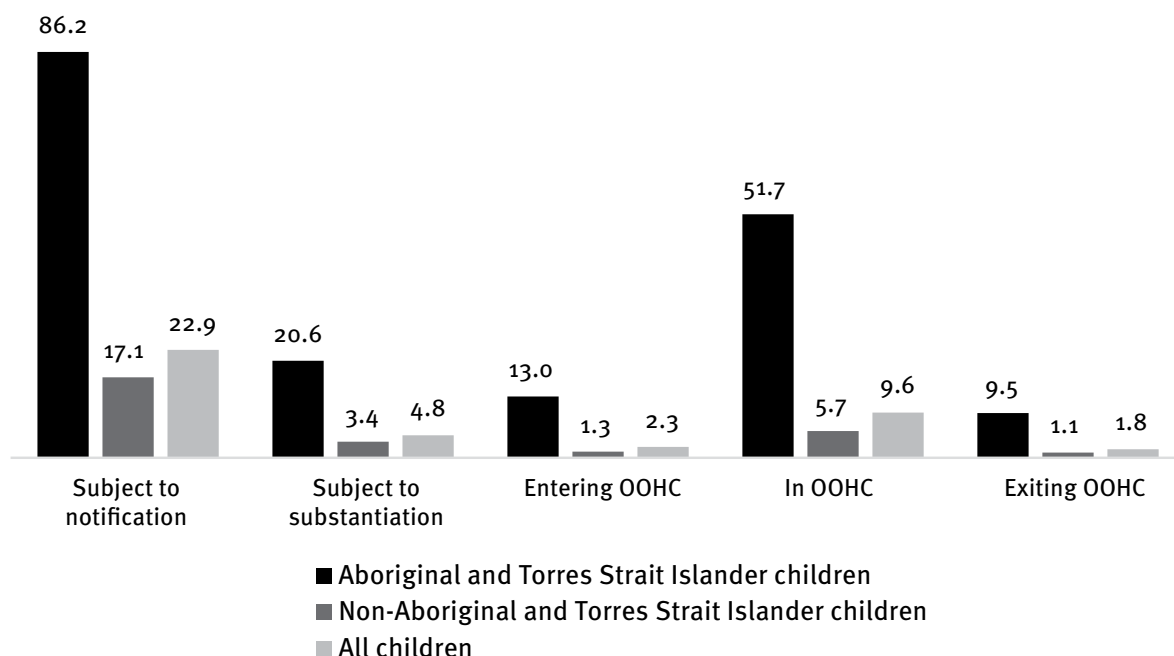
Indigenous infants,^{XCII} however, the infant mortality rate in 2021–22 in Queensland remains significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants than non-Indigenous infants (6.5 compared with 3.6 per 1,000 births).

Investment in Family Support and Child Protection Reforms are increasing. The government is providing increased funding of \$167.2 million over four years and \$20 million per annum ongoing to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system. The funding will build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services sector to meet the needs of children, young people and families and safely reunify children and young people with their families. A further \$14 million over four years and \$1.5 million per annum ongoing will be met internally by the Queensland Government.

What needs further improvement?

There is clear evidence of continuing disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Queensland child protection system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people account for around 8.2 per cent of all children in Queensland but they constitute approximately 47 per cent of all children in care.^{XCIII} Figure 9 demonstrates the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people at various stages of the child protection system.

Figure 9: Rates per 1,000 children and young people at various stages of the Queensland child protection statutory system, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (FY2021–22).



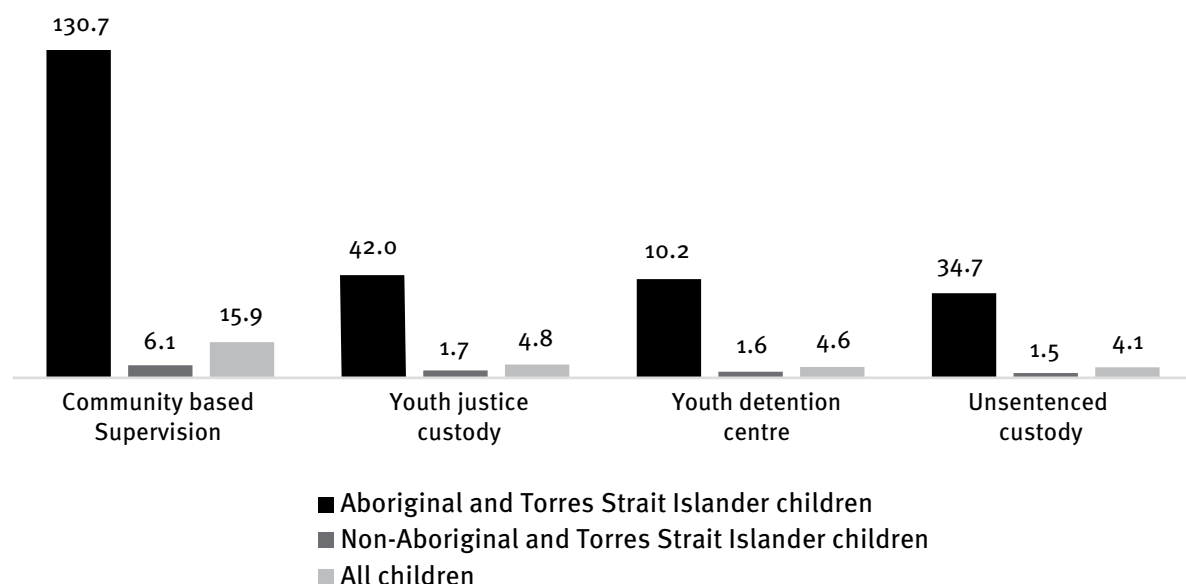
Source: Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services, 2023^{XCIV}

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care continues to exceed the number exiting. Between 2017–18 and 2021–22, the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering out-of-home care increased by 36.1 per cent from 948 to 1,290^{XCV} whereas the number exiting out-of-home care increased by just 27.4 per cent from 741 to 944.^{XCVI} For every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person who exited out-of-home care in 2021–22, 1.4 children and young people entered.^{XCVII}

Residential care placements continue to increase rapidly across the state for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. As at 30 June 2022, there were 704 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people placed in residential care, making up 44.6 per cent of all children and young people in residential care. This is an increase from 587 children and young people in 2021–22. Placements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in residential care increased 46 per cent between June 2020 and June 2022. Currently residential care interventions make up 14 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander out-of-home care placements. More than 90 per cent were placed in non-Indigenous facilities.^{xcviii} In late 2022, the QFCC released the report *The decision to place an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person in residential care*. The report examined the implementation of the child placement principle to a standard of active efforts when deciding to place an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person in residential care. The report highlighted the concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged under five years make up 80 per cent of all children under five placed in residential care.

The disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Queensland youth justice system is ongoing. Despite comprising only around 8.2 per cent of all children and young people aged 10–17 years in Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accounted for 50.1 per cent of all child defendants who had a charge finalised in a Queensland court in 2021–22.^{xcix} Figure 10 shows the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the Queensland youth justice system.

Figure 10: Rates per 10,000 young people involved with the Queensland youth justice system on an average day, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (2022).



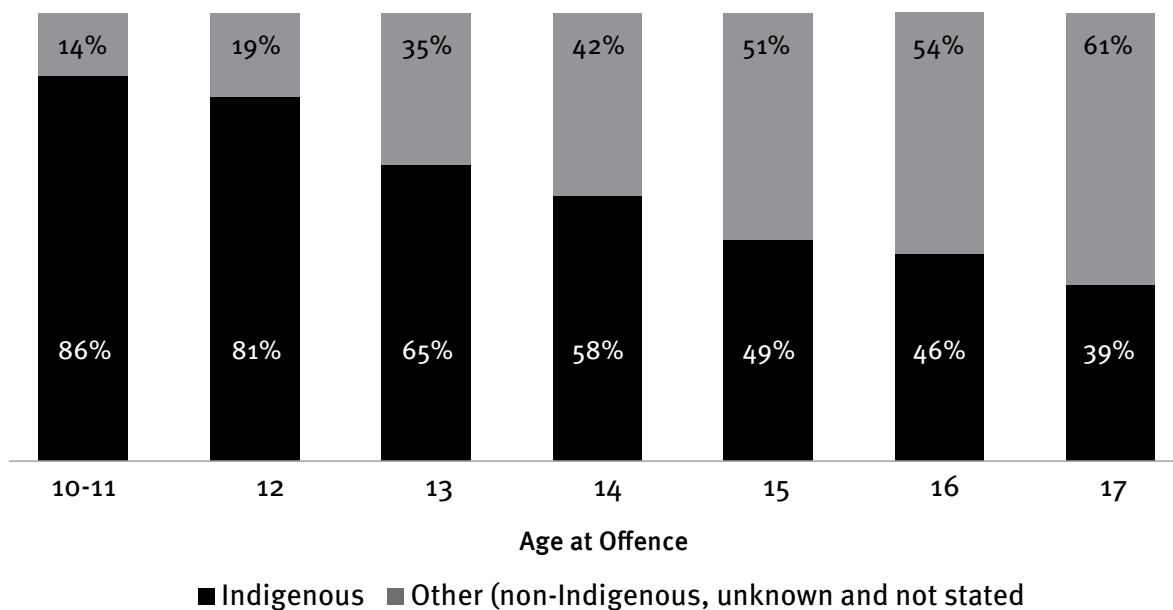
Source: Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training, 2023^c

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are less likely to be diverted from the youth justice system and disproportionate representation is highest for younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander defendants. Where appropriate, children and young people in conflict with the law should be dealt with, without judicial intervention.^{ci} Police can deal with offenders using court action (laying charges that must be answered in court) or non-court actions (such as cautions, conferencing or issuing fines). The rate of proceedings by police using court action against young people dropped between 2018–19 and 2021–22 for both First Nations and non-Indigenous young people, and the court action rate is still significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (71.9 per cent of proceedings in 2021–22 compared with 46.3 per cent for non-Indigenous young people).^{cii}

OBJECTIVE ONE

In 2021–22, 86.0 per cent of 10 and 11-year-old defendants, 81.0 per cent of 12-year-old defendants and 65.0 per cent of 13-year-old defendants were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (see Figure 11).^{ciii} In comparison with non-Indigenous children, 10 to 13-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are nearly 50 times more likely to be under community-based supervision and 38 times more likely to be in detention.^{civ} Of children who spent time in detention, on average, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were detained for 178.8 nights versus 96.2 nights for non-Indigenous children.^{cv}

Figure 11: A comparison of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of distinct child defendants, by age at offence (2021–2022).



Source: Children's Court of Queensland, 2022^{cvi}

Theme 5

Is the Queensland child protection and family support system a collaborative and accountable system?

This theme relates to the following state and national goals:

State goal 1:

Sharing responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children.

National goal 3:

Improved information sharing, data development and analysis.

State goal 7:

Building and maintaining an accountable, transparent, and cost-effective system.

Successful implementation of reforms and overall system improvement requires broad cooperation, and shared responsibility and governance.^{CVII} This is noted in the Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–23 strategy, which states, ‘Together with our sector and community partners, all relevant government agencies are working together to continuously improve connected services and systems to better support families through the Interdepartmental Committee.’^{CVIII} It also stresses the importance of building and maintaining an accountable, transparent and cost-effective system.

How does Queensland compare?

Queensland has a strong child and family support sector. There are many organisations operating to provide advocacy and frontline support to children and their families. Queensland led the Australian move towards collective impact through its delivery of the Logan Together model, and it is now continuing to demonstrate strong collaborative practice through emerging models, such as the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP). TQKP is a cross-sectoral ‘coalition of the willing’ made up of tertiary, not-for-profit, government and philanthropic bodies committed to making a difference.

Consistent with other Australian jurisdictions, Queensland is upgrading its data collection and information sharing capabilities. In Queensland, Child Safety is currently updating its Integrated Client Management System with a new client-centric system that will improve information sharing and collaboration across Queensland government agencies.^{CIX}

What is working well or improving?

There is increasing transparency about the performance of the statutory child safety system. The Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services has recently published data from a survey of children and young people living in out-of-home care about their experiences of the child protection system and the Minister for Child Safety has agreed to conduct this survey annually. This is in addition to the Our Performance website, providing data visualisations for several administrative data points, including the average caseload of child safety officers.^{CX}

Delegated Authority arrangements have helped to restore and recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to autonomy and self-governance. Under the arrangements, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) make certain decisions regarding children in their communities.^{CXI} The Queensland Government started trialling Delegated Authority arrangements in June 2022, in partnership with ACCOs, REFOCUS and Central Queensland Indigenous Development. The QFCC's 2021–22 over-representation snapshots highlighted that the Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland region has achieved an increase in kinship placements by eight per cent and reunified 48 children with their family, making up a quarter of all reunifications across Queensland (193 state-wide). This may be attributed to the collaborative family led approaches implemented in the region across the two Delegated Authority communities.

Queensland is seen as a leader in many areas of child safety practice. Notable national institutions focused on the safety and wellbeing of children are based in Queensland and our organisations are effective at delivering national change. The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation is based in Brisbane and brings together a world-leading approach, incorporating key stakeholders and partners, and driving a collective effort to counter the epidemic of child exploitation. Likewise the Daniel Morcombe Foundation is recognised as a national leader in the creation of child sexual abuse prevention curriculum and training, and Brisbane University's and researchers were involved in, and played a leadership role in the ground-breaking Australian Child Maltreatment Study – which was officially launched in Brisbane on 4 April 2023. Brisbane was also the host of the International Congress on Evidence Based Parenting, and the Queensland Family and Child Commission also plays a national leadership role in the best interests of children including through:

- facilitating and chairing the Australia and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians group
- hosting the Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention Group conference;
- publishing the Annual Australian Child Death Statistics Report.

There has been concerted effort to improve cross-portfolio coordination for individual children and young people. This includes several governance groups that have been tasked with leading and coordinating components of the child and family sector agenda:

- The youth justice taskforce led by the Queensland Police Service is focused on building intensive multiagency case management of high-risk repeat youth offenders.^{CXII}
- The QFCC's Child Death Review Board conducts systemic reviews following the death of a child connected to the child protection system.^{CXIII}
- Domestic violence high risk teams, led by the Attorney-General's department, enhance responses to domestic and family violence through time-critical information sharing, safety management for victims and increased line of sight of high-risk perpetrators.^{CXIV}
- The Queensland First Children and Families Board, consisting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders from across the state and supported by Child Safety, continues to provide strategic guidance and oversight of the implementation of the Our Way strategy.^{CXV}
- The Our Way Interagency Strategic Partnership group, led by Child Safety, including Deputy Directors-General from relevant government agencies, continues to foster cross-government action to eliminate the disparity of First Nations children, young people, and families in child protection.

Queensland's child protection and family support sector is committed to information sharing and collaboration. There are many examples of effective collaboration and local level leadership within the Queensland child protection and family support sector. The QFCC's 2023 survey of frontline workers found 77.9 per cent of respondents agreed that their workplace has a culture that supports collaboration with other organisations to achieve client outcomes.^{CXVI}

There has been an increase in multiagency collaborative responses. The Queensland Government has implemented a number of integrated responses to provide support to young people who are in the youth justice and child protection systems. These include:

- Multiagency collaborative panels (MACPs) for Government and non-government agencies to provide intensive case management and holistic support for those young people identified as high risk or requiring a collaborative response through a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach. These panels coordinate access for young people to services such as mental health, drug and alcohol programs, reconnecting with school and school engagement support, cultural connections, and connecting with doctors and allied health providers.
- Expansion of Youth Co-responder teams including dedicated teams of police and youth justice workers providing a rapid response to target young people at risk of offending and young people on bail. Already operational in many parts of Queensland, this initiative has completed 40,000 engagements with young people including to check their compliance with bail conditions and follow up to ensure they are accessing the right services. This service is being expanded into Toowoomba, Hervey Bay, Mount Isa, Ipswich, and South Brisbane.
- Expansion of the Stronger Communities initiative/ Early Action Group to bring together Police and other key Government representatives to provide intensive coordination of services to young people aged 8- 16 years who are at risk of entering the youth justice system, and their families. Early Action Groups have been rolled out in Townsville, Mount Isa and Cairns.
- The Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services has legislative responsibility for the establishment of a Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) system. The purpose of the SCAN team system is to enable a coordinated response to the protection needs of children. Core members of the SCAN team system are Child Safety, the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Health and the Department of Education.
- High risk teams (HRTs) as a core component of Queensland's integrated service response approach. HRTs are coordinated, multi-agency teams that collaborate to provide integrated, holistic, culturally appropriate safety responses for victims and their children who are at high risk of serious harm or lethality. HRTs consist of officers from agencies with a role in keeping victims safe and holding perpetrators to account, including specialist DFV services, police, health, corrections, housing, courts, child safety and youth justice.

What needs further improvement?

There are opportunities for Queensland to become more involved with cross-government and national data linkage initiatives. Better sharing and linking of data across different levels of government and with non-government organisations can improve our understanding of children and young people's experience of child protection and other service systems and of the service design and models that are required. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare collates national data about children and their experiences of childhood.^{CXVII} Any implementation of linked data sets about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples must apply data sovereignty principles aligned to the Closing the Gap priority reforms.

Better cross-agency visibility and coordination is needed, within and between government and non-government services, to ensure positive outcomes for all children and young people in Queensland. For example, our recent study of a sample of cases reviewed by the Child Death Review Board found that all school-aged children and young people in the sample were disengaging or disengaged from school. Each child who died by suicide had disengaged from education and learning.

The review also showed that children engaged with ECEC services had greater consistency of support services over time and had fewer periods of service interruption or disengagement. Children enrolled with an ECEC service were more visible to services, and families were linked with assistance through the primary and secondary support networks.

The *CDRB Annual Report 2021–22* highlighted the difficulties experienced by families residing in regional Queensland where service delivery is affected by distance, resourcing, and staff attrition. Our review found that children and young people residing within 50 kilometres of a major city were linked with more services and had more direct contact touchpoints than children and young people residing further from metropolitan areas. Children and young people residing in remote and very remote regions, including a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, had fewer engagements with secondary services.