



Queensland
Family & Child
Commission

2023–2024

Annual report

ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE

Queensland child protection system





The Queensland Family and Child Commission acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians across the lands, seas and skies on which we walk, live and work.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Queensland and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is a statutory body established by the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* to:

- promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people
- promote and advocate for the responsibility of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people
- improve the child protection system.

As part of its legislative obligations under section 40 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, the QFCC must 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.

We assessed Queensland’s performance across 2023–2024 against state goals in the *Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–23* whole-of-government strategy; national goals (focus areas) in *Safe and Supported: The national framework for protecting Australia’s children 2021–31*, including focus areas

within the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026* and key indicators from the *Family Matters* and *Closing the Gap* reports. As there are clear overlaps between the goals in these strategies, we have aligned them against five common goals (Table 1).

Table 1: Alignment of state and national goals – The performance of the Queensland child protection system 2023–2024 report

Goals used in this report	State goals	National goals
1. The Queensland child protection and family support system is 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
2. There are 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 6. Delivering quality services to Queensland children and families through a capable, motivated, and client -focused workforce	4. Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability
3. Queensland’s OOHC and youth justice systems are 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
4. Queensland’s OOHC and youth justice systems are 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
5. The Queensland child protection and family support system is a collaborative and accountable system	1. Sharing responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children 7. Building and maintaining an accountable, transparent, and cost-effective system	3. Improved information sharing, data development and analysis

GOAL 1

The Queensland child protection and family support system **supports families earlier**

National and international research provides strong evidence that an increased investment in prevention and early intervention programs is the best way to bolster community wellbeing and to prevent child abuse and neglect. Early support for families can deliver both immediate benefits to children and young people and enhance the long-term wellbeing of families, communities and society. Universal services including parenting programs, playgroups, neighbourhood centres, health, early childhood, education, housing, drug and alcohol services, mental health and domestic and family violence (DFV) services all play a critical role in addressing concerns in a family before matters reach a safety crisis.

Providing early support to children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability can safeguard their wellbeing and development and prevent their entry into the statutory system. Early intervention includes intervening early in life, early in the developmental pathway, or early in the life of the problem.

Amount spent per Queensland child (\$8333) versus Victoria (\$15,440) and New South Wales (\$13,160)

How does Queensland compare?



Investment in early supports is increasing but is still low.

Queensland has made notable strides in providing early support through various funded services. Family and Child Connect offers community-based referral services, while secondary family support services and universal healthcare, early childhood, education, and school initiatives also play vital roles. Despite increased investment in these areas, Queensland faces challenges in preventing families from entering the child protection system.

Across the last three years, expenditure on family services has increased, with Queensland's expenditure on Intensive Family Support (IFS) services rising significantly, from \$127.16 million in 2019–2020 to \$141.37 million in 2022–2023, marking an 11.2 per cent increase compared to a 0.2 per cent increase nationwide. Despite this increase, the per-child spend in Queensland (\$8333) still lags behind Victoria (\$15,440) and New South Wales (\$13,610) and the rate of children entering child protection remains unchanged, indicating this early support isn't fully effective in reaching those that require it.

Nationally in 2022–2023, Queensland had the third-highest rate of children in child protection services (34.4 per 1000), behind the Northern Territory (92.7 per 1000) and Victoria (34.7 per 1000). This increase underscores the need for more effective early intervention strategies.

34.4 per 1000 Queensland children in child protection services

In June 2024, the Queensland Government released its *Putting Queensland Kids First* plan and announced a funding commitment of more than \$501 million for its implementation. The plan seeks to improve the wellbeing of Queensland’s children and families by strengthening supports during the early years and increasing preventative and early supports during critical milestones and periods of development. Relevant wellbeing investments include funding to support partnerships between non-government organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, housing and support services for young mothers, babies and families, and the provision of more sustained health home visiting and antenatal supports.

What is working well?



The use and effectiveness of Queensland’s family support services.

Over the past four years, Queensland consistently had the second highest rate of children receiving IFS services, trailing only Tasmania. In 2022–2023, this rate was 14.0 per 1000 Queensland children. Most Queensland families who attended either an IFS service or Family Wellbeing Services (FWS) whose cases were closed with ‘all or the majority of their needs met’ did not have a subsequent notification, although there has been a slight drop in the proportion over time (Table 2). Many families are proactively seeking help, with nearly one in six referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FWS initiated by families themselves.

Table 2: Number (%) of children whose case was closed with ‘all or the majority of their needs met’ with no subsequent notification within six months (2019–2020 to 2022–2023)

	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023
IFS	3171 (90.8%)	3001 (90.1%)	3444 (88.1%)	3670 (87.9%)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FWS	1377 (91.7%)	1869 (93.0%)	1870 (87.3%)	1878 (89.4%)

Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).



Increased investment in homelessness prevention.

Recent years have seen substantial commitments from both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to enhance social and affordable housing. The Queensland Government's 2024 *Homes for Queenslanders* initiative has been pivotal, featuring significant investments aimed at preventing homelessness among children, young people and vulnerable families. Key investments include eight new youth foyers, a new support centre for youth at risk of homelessness, and placement of a youth justice team within the Department of Housing to support young people as they exit detention. Additionally, the Immediate housing response for families fund has provided 160,000 nights of accommodation and supported 7680 households. Under the *Homes for Queenslanders* plan, an independent review set to be released in late 2024 will evaluate the effectiveness of Queensland's homelessness response.

160,000 nights of accommodation provided by the Immediate housing response for families fund



Increased investment and collaborative efforts in early childhood.

Early Years Services (EYS) improve early childhood developmental outcomes with activities that respond to the needs and families. In 2023–2024 the government invested in two purpose-built facilities to bring together school communities, their families and local services and supports in the South East region. Key EYS programs include but are not limited to Early Years Places which are provided in more than 50 communities across Queensland and Pathways for Early Learning and Development. The total number of children participating at an EYS for the July to December 2023 period, as reported by the services, was 10,849.

Place-based approaches recognise the multi-dimensional nature of communities and that joined-up, collaborative efforts by the community, government and non-government partners, will improve wellbeing. Grants to small local services and statewide organisations support the delivery of a range of EYS across Queensland to give children a strong start. Cross-agency consultation is occurring to ensure proposed additional integrated response locations and services are responding holistically to community contexts and needs. This consultation is aiming to understand and improve access for young children and their families to early childhood services and programs, as protective factors required to support child development and family wellbeing.

Increased funding for mental health and alcohol and drug use initiatives.

The Queensland Government has increased funding for mental health and substance use initiatives, launching a five-year plan to improve the wellbeing of all Queenslanders. *Shifting Minds: The Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs and Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 2023–2028*, introduced in August 2023, aims to prevent and reduce the impact of mental ill-health, substance use and suicide. Key investments include:

- \$1.65 billion allocated to *Better Care Together: A plan for Queensland's state-funded mental health, alcohol and other drug services to 2027*
- new frontline mental health services for children and young people, including acute response teams at 12 Hospital and Health Services across the state;
- dedicated adolescent mental health units; and
- funding to support new parents and infants through investments in perinatal healthcare.

Additionally, existing services such as Kids Helpline and Lifeline have also received additional funding. *Shifting minds* will be supported by a monitoring and evaluation framework led by the Queensland Mental Health Commission. Further health initiatives include vaping prevention and providing education on drugs, alcohol, mental health and sexual consent for year 12 students.



Targeted investment by Department of Education to improve school engagement and fund support initiatives to improve school completion rates.

After a low of 48.7 per cent in 2022, school attendance rates (attending school 90% of the time) increased in 2023 to 54.9 per cent. While this was an improvement, rates are far below pre-COVID levels (68.3% in 2019). Similar trends have occurred in other states and territories and, in response, the 2022–2023 inquiry into the national trend of school refusal and related matters recommended better access to mental health care for students. Since 2023, the Queensland Government has funded various initiatives to enhance school engagement and completion, including programs for First Nations students, expanding Pathways State Colleges for vulnerable students, intensive case management for justice-involved students, and the Regional Youth Engagement Service. These initiatives are timely as the apparent year 10 to year 12 retention rate has steadily dropped from 88.1 per cent in 2019 to 80.7 per cent in 2023. In 2022, the Regional Youth Engagement Service helped 5870 at-risk and disengaged young people, with 2584 re-engaging in education, training or employment. Between 2019 and 2023, the proportion of young people who had completed year 12 or equivalent rose from 89.6 per cent to 92.2 per cent, suggesting the positive impact of these investments.



Closing the Gap outcome 5 is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential. In 2021, 75.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 20 to 24 years had attained a year 12 or equivalent qualification. This outcome has been improving but the target is not yet on track. 😞

School attendance levels
54.9 per cent of students
attend school 90% of the time



Higher kindergarten enrolment rates driven by funded subsidies.

In 2023 the QFCC published a report analysing the life trajectories of 30 children that had died. The analysis emphasised the protective factors that engagement in early childhood education provide for infants. The Queensland Government will invest \$2 billion over four years to ensure all children can access free kindergarten, with a focus on children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. Kindergarten funding is also provided to address educational disadvantage (kindy uplift program), inclusion and attraction, and retention of early childhood teachers (scholarship scheme, paid practicum and planning days). Rates of kindergarten enrolment for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage published by the Australian Bureau of

Statistics, have increased between 2020 and 2023 from 80.2 per cent to 92.6 per cent. However, enrolment rates vary by region, from 100 per cent enrolment in the North Coast and Metropolitan North regions to 87 per cent in both the Darling Downs and North Queensland regions.



Closing the Gap outcome 3 is that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.** In 2022, 95.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in 'year before full-time schooling' early childhood education, meaning this target has been met. ✓



What needs further improvement?

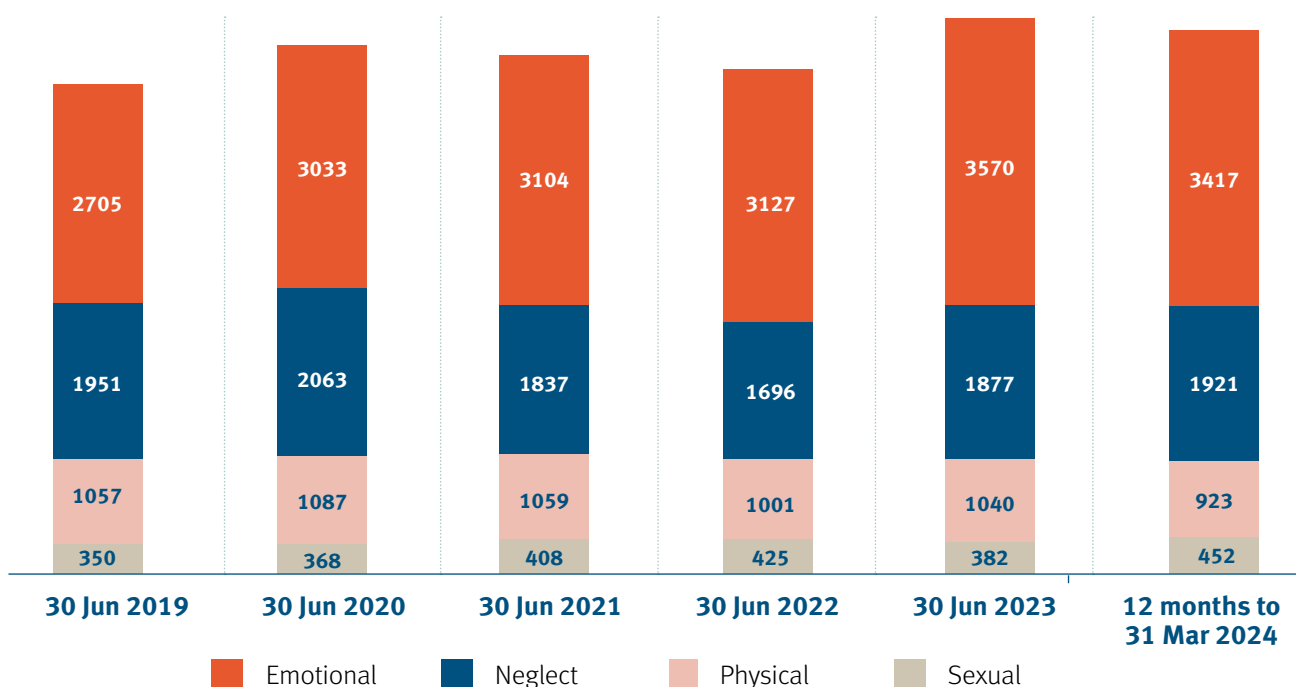


The increase in substantiated harm against Queensland children.

More Queensland children have been found to have been harmed or at risk of harm with a 12.1 per cent increase in substantiated child protection investigations from 6494 in 2019–2020 to 7283 in 2022–2023. To 30 June 2023, the growth in the number of children substantiated was driven by a 32.0 per cent increase in substantiated cases of emotional abuse (Figure 1). In 2018–2019, emotional abuse comprised 44.6 per cent of all substantiations, and this rose to 52.0 per cent in 2022–2023.



Figure 1: Substantiated investigations by primary harm type





Unaddressed adversity continues to be a precursor to youth justice exposure.

Almost two in five young people (38%) under supervision on an average day in 2022–2023 were from the lowest socioeconomic areas, compared with about one in 20 young people (4.9%) from the highest socioeconomic areas. Among 107 offenders who were surveyed in Queensland’s 2023 Youth Justice Census:

- 48 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;
- 25 per cent had at least one parent who spent time in adult custody;
- 44 per cent had a disability (diagnosed or suspected); and
- 44 per cent had a least one mental health and/or behavioural disorder (diagnosed or suspected).

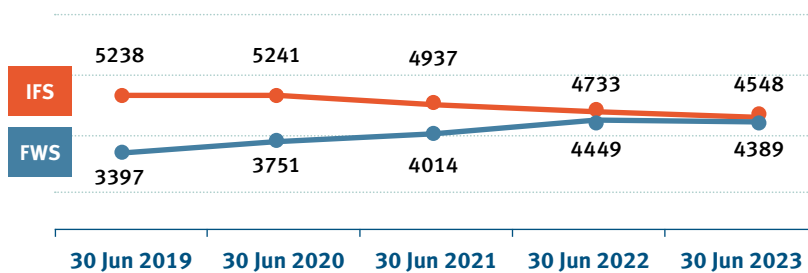


Increased investment in Family Support services is not reaching the families that require support.

In 2023, only seven per cent of respondents to our frontline workforce survey agreed there was sufficient capacity within the secondary support service system to meet demand, up from five per cent in 2021, while 83 per cent disagreed. Only 20 per cent believed that IFS and FWS have reduced demand on the child protection system, with sentiment showing a consistent downward trend since 2020 (27 per cent). In the QFCC survey of 319 parents and carers who had been in contact with the child protection system, 45 per cent felt they received helpful family support services, while 36 per cent disagreed. The remaining parents neither agreed nor disagreed. Concerns have been raised by our stakeholders about families not attending secondary support services following a referral. In 2022–2023, only 40 per cent of the 6203 families referred to IFS and 47.3 per cent of the 5259 families referred to FWS consented to commence services. The number of families receiving IFS services continues to drop while the number accessing FWS is increasing (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of families attending IFS services and FWS

Trend



Service	1-year change	5-year change
IFS	3.9% ↓	13.2% ↓
FWS	1.3% ↓	29.2% ↑

Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).



Between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, Queensland saw a **41.3 per cent increase in families accessing specialist homelessness services**, while Australia as a whole experienced a 7.5 per cent decrease.



The increased prevalence of DFV despite significant investment in prevention and a service system that is struggling to meet demand.

DFV-related offences increased notably from 423.7 per 100,000 persons in 2021–2022 to 518.9 per 100,000 in 2022–2023. The reasons for this increase are complex, driven by factors such as heightened public awareness and improved reporting mechanisms. Between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2023, 123 domestic and family violence-related deaths occurred in the context of an intimate partner or family relationship in Queensland. Of these 123 deaths, the alleged homicide offender was male in 68 per cent of cases. Sixteen deaths occurred in 2022–2023. Additionally, in 2022–2023, 37 (62%) of children whose deaths were reviewed by the Child Death Review Board had experienced DFV in their life.

Across 2023–2024, addressing DFV was a top priority for both state and Commonwealth governments, prompting significant strategies and funding. Queensland's approach is informed by the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce's *Hear Her Voice* reports, which provide an extensive analysis of legal and social responses to DFV in Queensland. A major reform agenda is currently underway to combat DFV and sexual violence which includes substantial funding for DFV prevention initiatives and improved support for survivors. Key measures include updated legislation on coercive control and affirmative consent, along with significant investments in DFV services and accommodation for women escaping DFV. In December 2023, the Queensland Government published a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the outcomes and impacts of system level domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) reforms. Anticipated short-term outcomes include increasing awareness about DFSV, increased willingness to report DFSV and increased accountability for people using DFSV. A recent progress report by the Office of the Independent Implementation Supervisor highlighted concerns about the readiness of the DFV service system for the new offence of coercive control. Stakeholders reported that services remain primarily crisis-driven and are unable to meet current demand. Issues with recruiting and retaining skilled staff were also noted and for the third year running, the QFCC's annual survey of frontline workers identified specialist DFV, alcohol and drug use, and mental health training as the highest priority for learning and development.





The rising cost of living continuing to drive housing stress and homelessness for children and families, despite significant government investment.

Over the past three years, there has been a sharp increase in the cost of living, including housing costs. In our 2024 Community perceptions survey, 91.0 per cent of respondents agreed the cost of living is having a negative impact on families. This was slightly higher for respondents responsible for a child aged 0–17 years (93%) than others (90% of those not responsible for a child). As of 30 June 2023, there were 17,339 children and young people on the Queensland public housing register awaiting housing offers. The number of unassisted requests for people presenting as part of a family to specialist homelessness services in Queensland increased from 1112 in 2021–2022 to 1629 in 2022–2023, and a 41.3 per cent increase between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, compared to a 7.5% decrease nationally. Queensland also saw a 7.3 per cent increase in young people aged 15–24 presenting alone accessing homelessness services, compared to 10.8 per cent decrease nationally. There was also a 6.2 per cent increase in children under a child protection order seeking support (from 1200 to 1274). From 2018 to 2023, median rents in Queensland increased by 42.9 per cent. Private rent in Queensland has risen faster than in any other Australian jurisdiction, particularly in regional markets. Rent increases have far outpaced wage growth and family support payments. In 2023, 13.1 per cent of Queensland young people were very or extremely concerned about financial security.



Closing the Gap outcome 9 is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and needs.

In 2021, 81.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were living in appropriately sized (not over-crowded) housing. This target, which is 88 per cent by 2031, is not on track. 😞



The prevalence of health issues, including mental health, and drug and alcohol misuse, especially among children and families in contact with statutory systems, despite new funding.

In 2021, only 50.0 per cent of Queensland children were developmentally on track for physical health and wellbeing in their first year of schooling. This highlights the importance of accessible health assessments for vulnerable Queensland families to ensure children can receive developmental assessments and appropriate supports during their early years. Among children in contact with the child protection system, 65.0 per cent of households with a child in need of protection had a parent with a mental health issue, and 67.0 per cent had a parent with a current or past drug or alcohol problem. Nearly one quarter of children in OOHC rate their mental health as poor or very poor.

Suicide has become the leading cause of death among children aged 10 to 14 years, as shown in our Child Death Annual Report 2022–2023. In our Growing Up in Queensland report, 34.8 per cent of young Queenslanders were very concerned about mental health, and 40.7 per cent were very concerned about coping with stress. Despite increased funding, findings from our 2024 community perceptions survey indicate that 68.0 per cent of respondents who tried to access youth mental health services in the last three years experienced barriers. These barriers included long waitlists (72%), unaffordable services (58%), uncertainty about how to get a referral (23%) and lack of services in their area (20%). Only 43.0 per cent of respondents to our 2024 workforce survey agreed that children and young people attending their organisation could access mental health services when needed. Another identified barrier was young pregnant women unable to access perinatal mental health services due to restrictions limiting services to pregnant women over the age of 18 years.

Among young offenders, 81.0 per cent have used at least one substance, 38.0 per cent have used ice or other methamphetamines, and 44.0 per cent have a mental health and/or behavioural disorder.



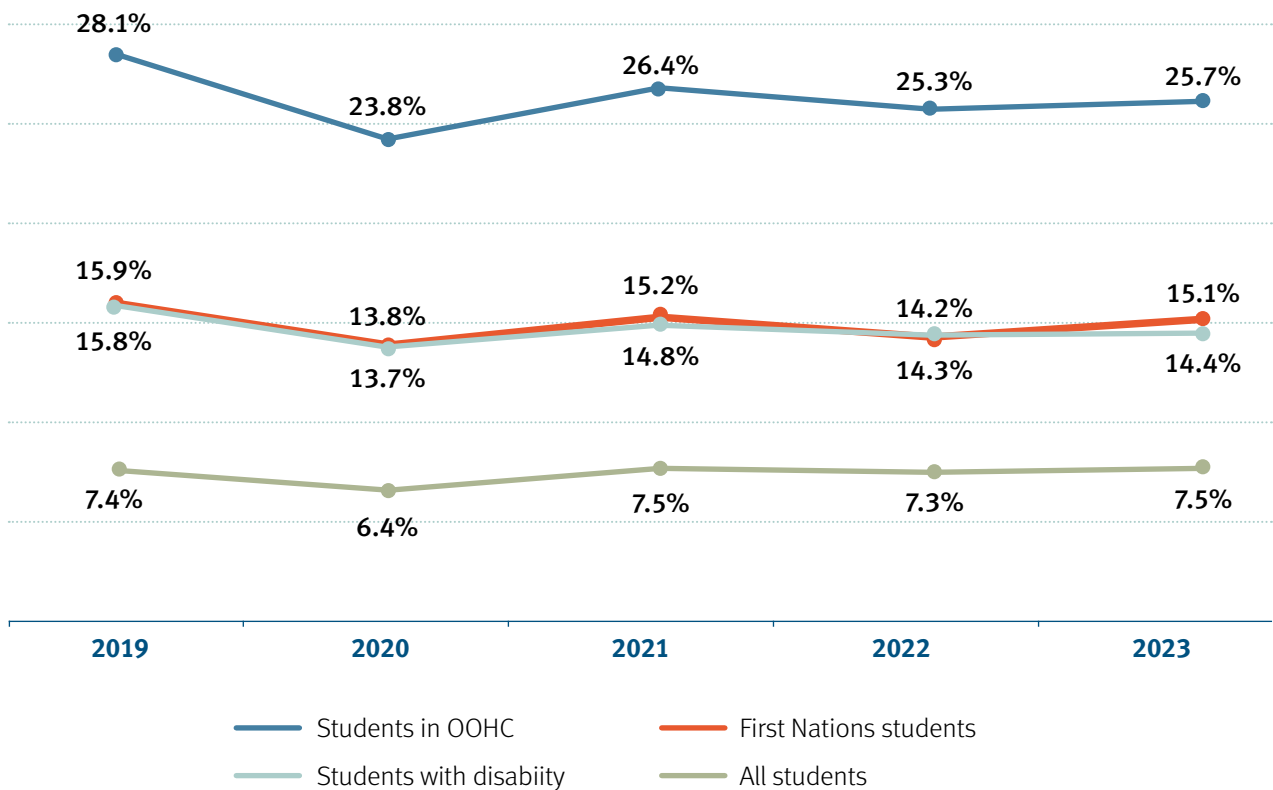
Student Disciplinary Absences (SDAs) for First Nations children and the likelihood of students with a disability and those in OOHC to perform less well academically.



In 2022, the QFCC submitted concerns to the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into the National School Reform Agreement, and in 2023, our Child Rights Report repeated concerns about the overuse of SDAs and their impact on children and young people. Both reports stressed the need for alternative pathways to ensure children can continue their education and stay connected to school staff who can refer them to broader support services. Overall, rates of SDAs have been stable since 2019.

In 2023, compared to all students, rates of SDAs were approximately double among students with a disability and First Nations students while rates of SDAs among students living in OOHC were 3.4 times higher. Furthermore, in 2023, in every year level, students in OOHC were less likely to have a ‘proficiency level of developing, strong, or exceeding result’ compared with non-OOHC students. For example, 62.4 per cent of year 3 OOHC students versus 86.0 per cent of non-OOHC students met this proficiency level for writing, while 56.9 per cent of year 3 OOHC students versus 83.5 per cent of non-OOHC students met this proficiency level for numeracy.


Figure 3: SDAs for four groups of Queensland children



Source: Department of Education (2024). Unpublished data request.



There are sufficient resources to **provide quality support services** to Queensland children and families when needed



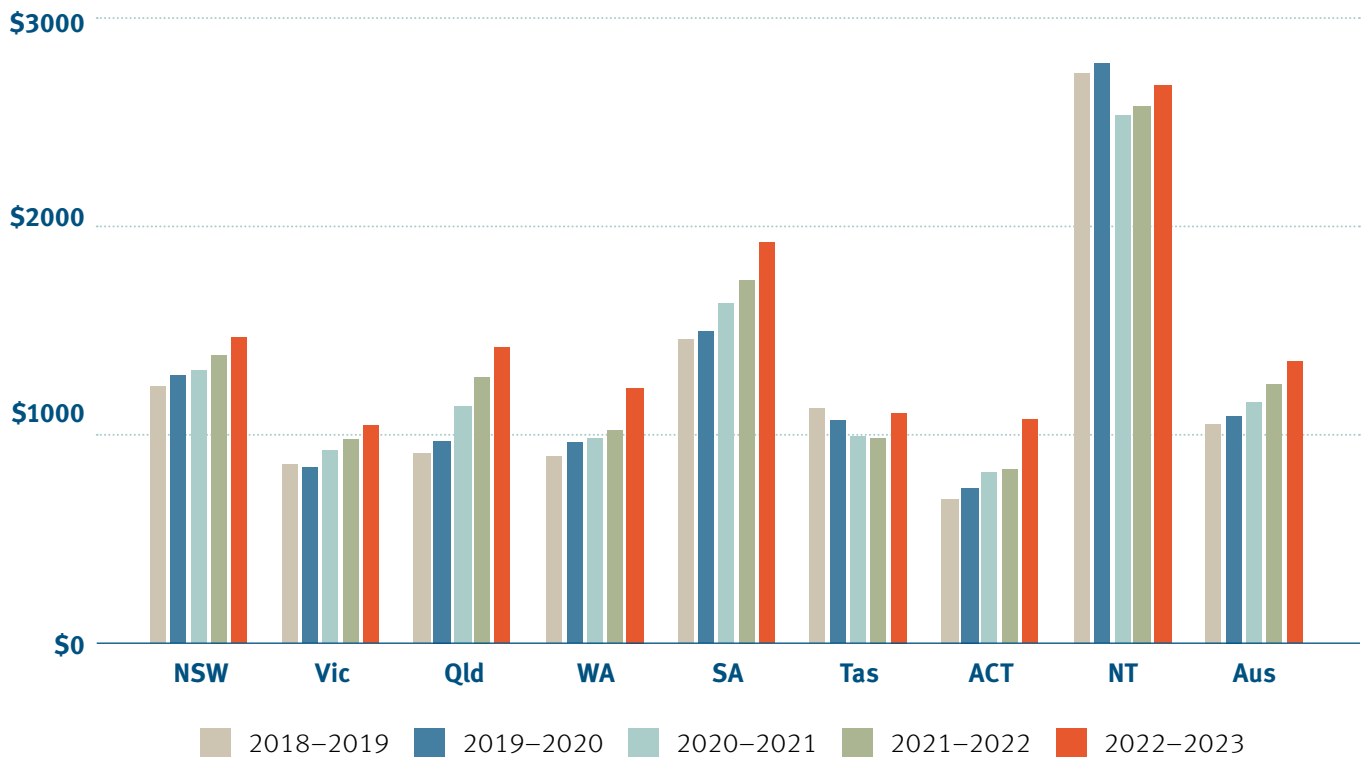
In Queensland, the child protection and family support systems respond to concerns about the care and protection of children who have been, or who are at risk of being abused, neglected or exploited by their family. The child protection and family support systems consist of both secondary and statutory approaches, which are provided based on the level of need, risk and harm. Children and their families may receive a secondary service to support families to keep their children safe or a statutory response, which may include being subject to an investigation.

How does Queensland compare?

Figure 4 presents a comparison of the dollar amount spent per child aged 0–17 years on protective intervention services and care services across Australian jurisdictions over the past five years. It shows that overall expenditure is increasing and that Queensland's spend per child (\$1454) in 2022–2023 was the fourth highest behind the Northern Territory (\$2741), South Australia (\$1968) and New South Wales (\$1503).



Figure 4: Comparison of the dollar amount spent per child aged 0–17 years over the past five years

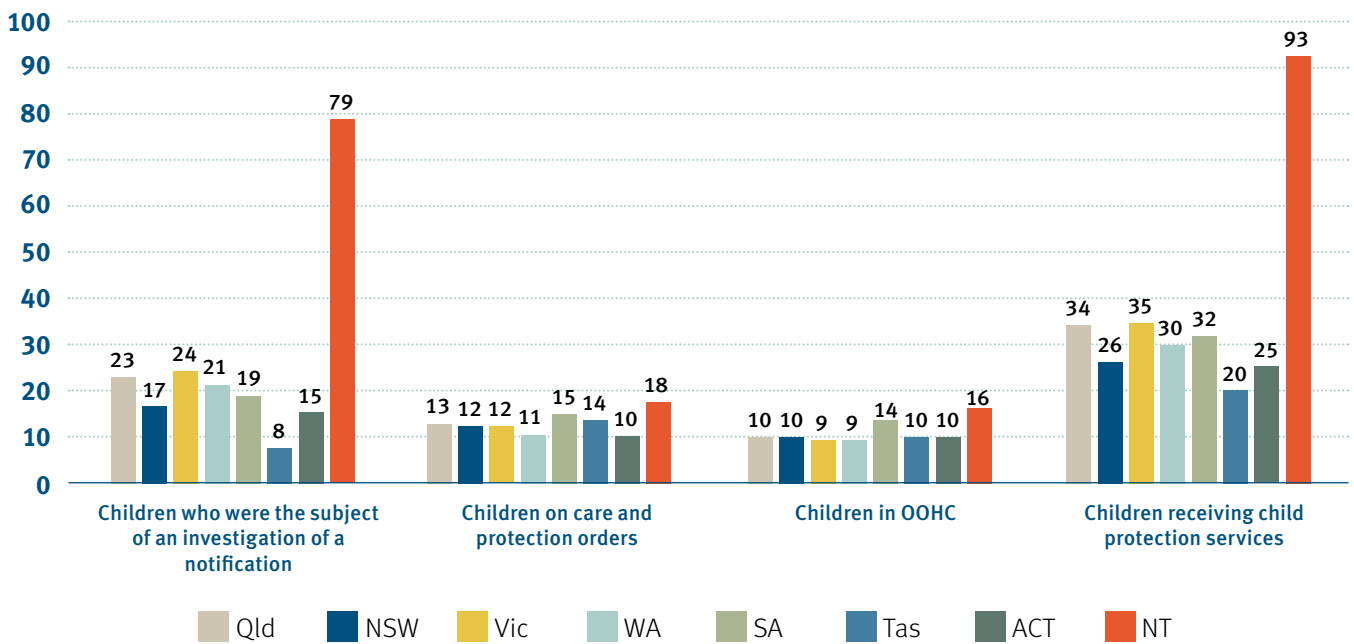


Source: Productivity Commission (2024) *Report on government services – Table 16A.8*

In the 2024–2025 budget, \$2.30 billion was allocated to child and family services within the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS), down from \$2.36 billion in 2023–2024. It should be noted that machinery of government changes which occurred in May and December 2023 led to the transfer of some department functions. Capital works funding of \$9.25 million has been allocated to the development of Unify and other information system enhancements as well as \$5.51 million to update child and family services facilities.

During 2022–2023, 180,125 children received child protection services in Australia, including 41,549 Queensland children and young people (a 4.9% increase over the 39,626 in 2021–2022). Queensland’s rate in 2022–2023 of children and young people who were the subject of an investigation of a notification was slightly above the national average (23.0 per 1000 in Queensland vs 21.1 per 1000 nationally) as was its rate of children receiving child protection services (34.4 per 1000 in Queensland vs 31.5 per 1000 nationally).

Figure 5: Percentage of children receiving child protection services



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2024). *Child protection Australia*, Table 2.2.

Since 2018–2019, Queensland has seen increases in both the total number and rate of children in OOHC. In 2022–2023, its rate of children in OOHC (8.1 per 1000 children) was slightly higher than the Australia-wide rate (7.9 per 1000 children). Over the same time period, rates increased for children in South Australia, consistently decreased in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, and remained steady in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

Queensland spends more on youth justice services than any other jurisdiction, although increases in funding have been primarily spent on detention-based services. For 2024–2025, the Queensland Government announced a youth justice budget of \$481.5 million, a 107.7 per cent increase on the 2023–2024 budget (\$232.0 million). The capital works program for the Department of Youth Justice (DYJ) is \$221.1 million in 2024–2025 which is predominantly allocated to the

ongoing construction of Woodford Youth Detention Centre and upgrades to other detention centres and service centres. \$261.4 million has been committed to deliver a therapeutic operational model at the Woodford Youth Detention Centre, to ensure young people detained can access rehabilitation programs and support.

In 2022–2023, Queensland had the highest spending of any jurisdiction on youth justice services. While overall, funding for youth justice services in Queensland has increased by 26.7 per cent, as shown in Table 3, the majority of the increase has funded detention-based services.



Table 3: Real recurrent expenditure on Queensland Youth Justice services (\$'000), with percentage change, 2018–2019 to 2022–2023

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	5-year increase
Group conferencing	\$7770	\$8628	\$7135	\$7362	\$7486	3.7% decrease
Community-based services	\$145,269	\$162,067	\$136,277	\$124,908	\$143,935	0.9% decrease
Detention-based services	\$130,340	\$134,948	\$172,271	\$227,026	\$207,695	59.3% increase
Total	\$283,379	\$305,643	\$315,683	\$359,297	\$359,116	26.7% increase

Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on government services: Youth Justice services Table 17A.10*

In 2022–2023, the cost of one group conference was about the same as 16 nights under community supervision and two nights in youth detention.

What is working well or improving?



Frontline workforce growth and the implementation of demand-based funding to assist with timely responses to growing demand.

The most recently available data describing Queensland's child welfare workforce estimated it to be 3296 full-time equivalent (FTE) including caseworkers, other workers and frontline support. The frontline child protection and family support workforce includes case workers employed by Child Safety, case workers and other staff employed by non-government organisations, and staff within other organisations such as Youth Justice. Other relevant employees include DoE's student protection principal advisors and staff employed by Queensland Health and Queensland Police Service (QPS) within their respective Child Protection Units. It also includes frontline police

in the Child Protection and Investigation units, and Australian Federal Police in child exploitation roles. Our government stakeholders advised they saw value in increasing their agency's child protection staffing to be able to support more timely and proactive responses for children.

On 13 June 2023, the Queensland Government announced \$11.4 million for 123 additional Child Safety frontline staff. Demand-based funding has been introduced for the child protection workforce, ensuring that as cases increase, more positions become available. Child Safety reported that between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023, its number of child safety officers consistently remained around 1150 FTE. Between 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 there was a sharp increase (10.5%) and the number of positions increased to 1260.44 FTE. Between 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2024, the average caseload of a full-time Child Safety Officer slightly decreased from 15.8 to 15.4.

Investment in frontline workforce remains critical. Our 2024 survey of frontline workers showed that 17 per cent of child safety workers and 19 per cent of youth justice workers intend to leave the sector within the next 12 months.



The Queensland child protection and family support workforce remaining committed to supporting children and their families.

A committed child protection and family support workforce is crucial to supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families in extremely complex situations with multiple services involved. This workforce must make decisions alongside families, which can be ethically fraught and emotionally challenging, demanding a high level of knowledge and skill. With demand on services increasing, this can also impact their workload and wellbeing. Encouragingly, the majority of respondents

to the QFCC's 2024 survey of the frontline workforce agreed their work serves an important purpose (96%), leads to positive change (77%), and gives them a sense of satisfaction (78%).



The effectiveness of child safety interventions.

Between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, there has been an increase in the proportion of children and young people who did not experience subsequent substantiations after their initial substantiation. This increase was maintained in the 12 months to 31 March 2024 at just over 85 per cent (Table 4).

Table 4: Number (and %) of individual children and young people who did not experience a further substantiation within 12 months after their first substantiation

	12 months ending					
	30 Jun 2019	30 Jun 2020	30 Jun 2021	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2023	31 Mar 2024
No substantiation after first substantiation	5422 (81.5%)	5830 (82.7%)	6277 (84.3%)	6300 (85.6%)	6487 (85.7%)	6501 (85.3%)

Source: DCSSDS (2024)



What needs further improvement?



The increased demand on the child protection system.

Over the past five years there has been an increase in child concern reports (9.4%) and a sharp increase in notifications (34.5%). The number of substantiations has also been consistently growing (a 13.3% increase) as has the number of children in OOHC (a 20.2% increase). By contrast there has been a gradual decrease in the use of intervention with parental agreement (4.3%) (Table 5). Of the 41,549 Queensland children and young people that received a child protection service in 2022–2023, 28,199 (67.9%) had received a service in a prior year.

Table 5: Number of individual children and young people subject to DCSSDS interventions

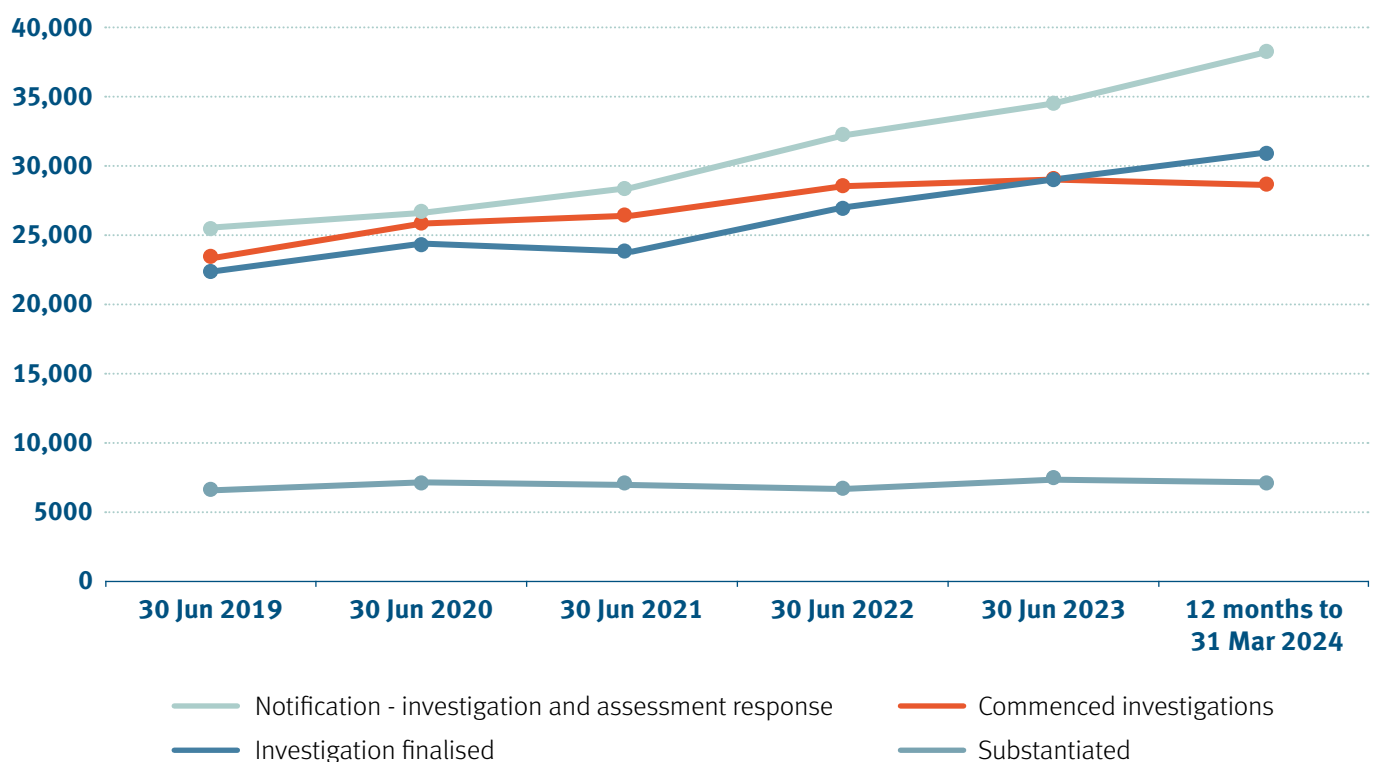
	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	5-year trend	1-year trend
Notifications	22,767	23,273	25,233	28,587	30,628	34.5% increase	6.7% increase
Substantiations	6063	6551	6408	6249	6869	13.3% increase	9.9% increase
In OOHC	9647	10,527	11,065	11,323	11,593	20.2% increase	2.4% increase
Intervention with parental agreement	2095	1988	1863	2043	2005	4.3% decrease	1.9% decrease
Entering OOHC	2807	3117	2958	2705	2804	0.1% decrease	3.7% increase
Exiting OOHC	1786	1803	2022	2096	2217	19.4% increase	5.5% increase

Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

This is a national issue, in part fuelled by increased and multiple reporting about the same children. According to the AIHW, in 2021–2022, 275,000 children had 471,000 reports of harm made about them to a state

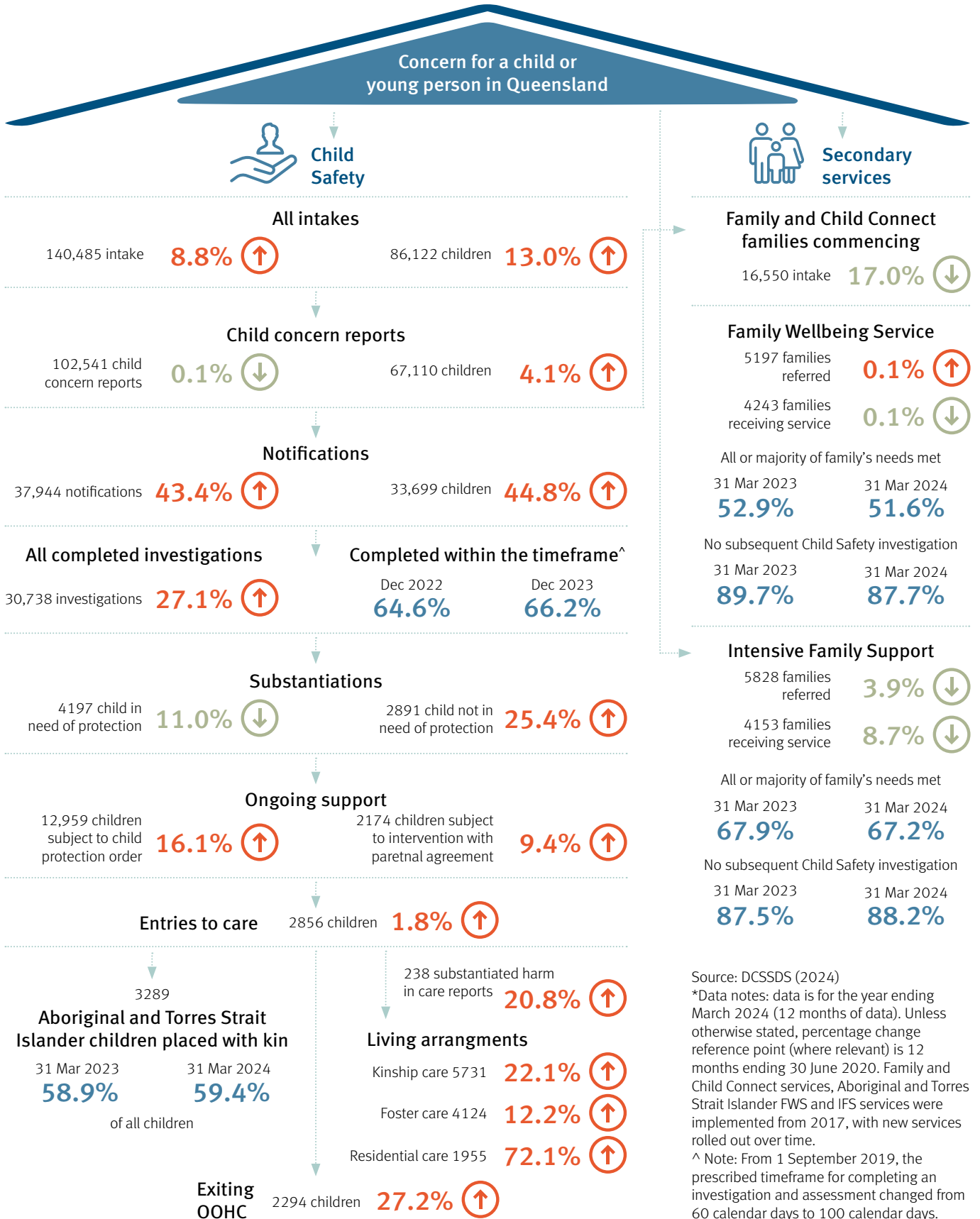
or territory child protection service, but fewer than half were investigated and only 45,500 were substantiated. It has been reported that ‘the volume of notifications is at unsustainable levels’.

Figure 6: Child protection demand - Five-year trend



Summary of the demand in Queensland's child protection and family support system

Figure 7: Flow chart with relevant available data for various points of the child protection and family support system—12 months ending 31 March 2024 noting percentage change from 12 month ending 30 June 2020





The growing number of concerns received by Child Safety creating a challenge for the department in investigating and closing cases within response times.

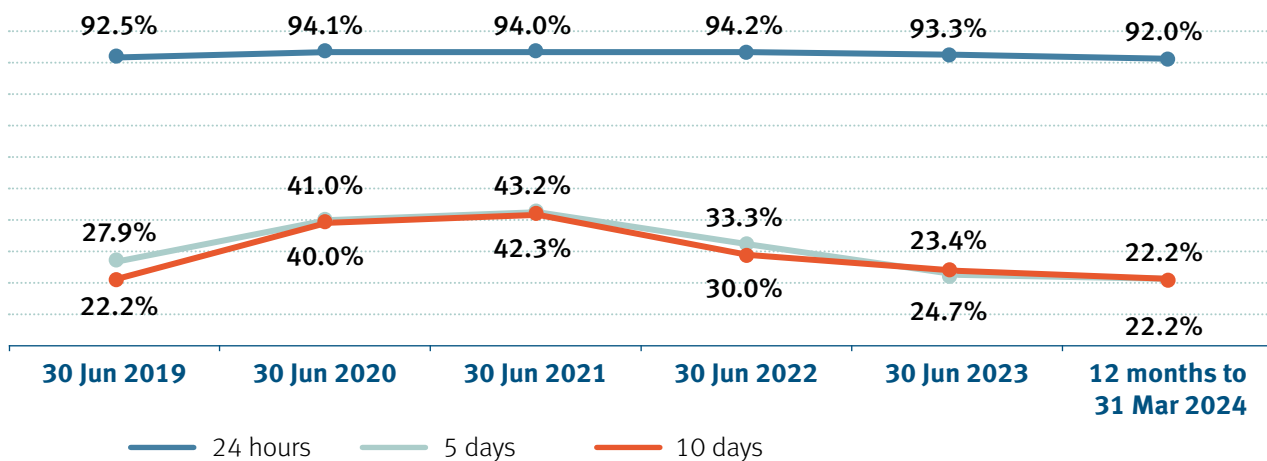
The number of cases finalised with the outcome of ‘other’ has been rapidly growing. An outcome of ‘other’ means a full investigation was not possible and the case was closed. This may occur in cases where a family has relocated to another state, or the family cannot be located. In the 12 months to 31 March 2024, 5737 cases were closed under this category, almost 10 times more than in the 12 months to 30 June 2019 (606 cases). Compared to 2018–2019, the increase is 565.0 per cent. This surge follows the introduction of a process in October 2021 (revised in October 2022) allowing investigations to be closed after 100 days without sighting the child if no new information is received, raising concerns about child welfare. In 2023–2024, the Department is likely to close more investigations than it commences.



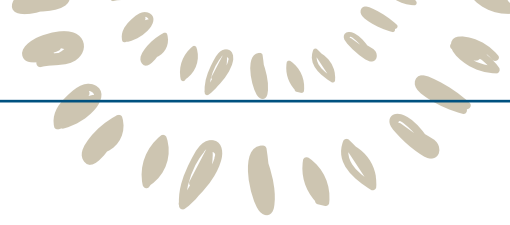
The increase in Child Safety’s response time to commence investigations after a notification has been received.

In September 2021, 12 months after the completion of the *Seeing they are Safe: Responsiveness to 5-day and 10-day notifications of child harm in Queensland review*, the QFCC sought evidence of improvements to timely investigation assessments. 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. At 31 March 2023, almost half (45%) of notifications were commenced by information gathering. The most recent data on five-day and 10-day notifications indicates that the percentage of investigations commenced within the timeframe is now slightly worse (five days) or about the same (10 days) as before our review was conducted.

Figure 8: Percentage of investigation and assessments commenced within the timeframe with 5-day and 10-day response frames



Source: Child Safety (2024). *Our Performance* (website).



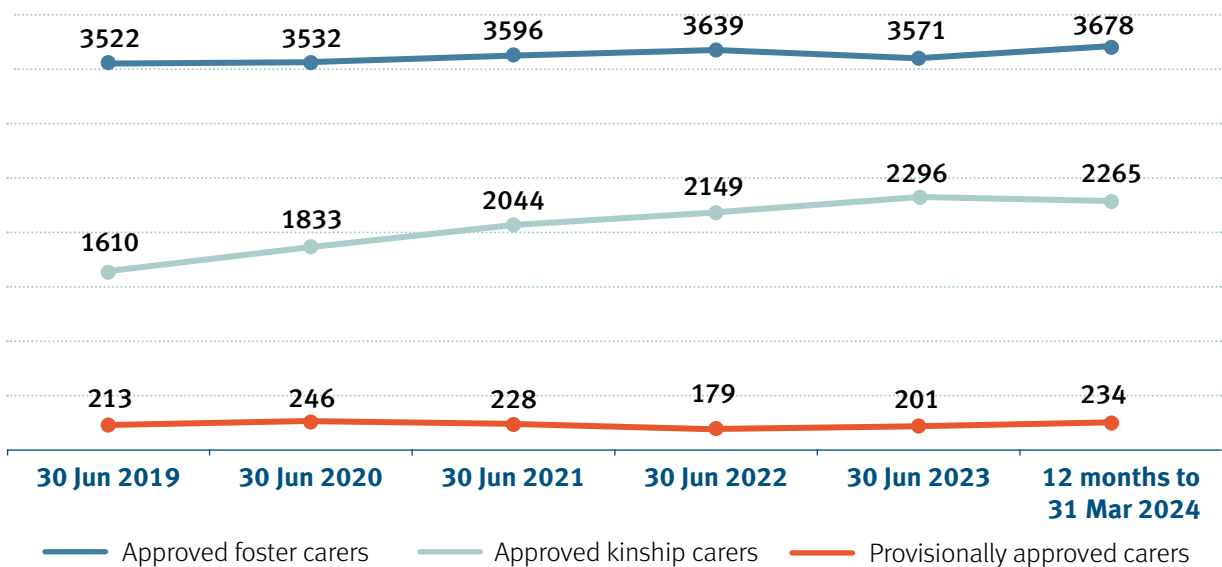
The insufficient amount of carer families compared to the number of children in care.

When children and young people cannot live safely at home for a time, foster carers are instrumental in providing temporary, safe and nurturing care in a family-based environment. Consistent with other jurisdictions, due to many households exiting foster care, Queensland continues to experience a shortage of foster carers which results in children and young people being placed in residential care.

Between 30 June 2019 and 31 March 2024 there was a 40.7 per cent increase in kinship carers from 1610 to 2265, however the number of foster carers only increased by 4.4 per cent from 3522 to 3678. Despite significant efforts to recruit new carer families, the number of foster carers leaving the system continues to exceed the number commencing. In the year ending 31 March 2024,

there were 346 foster carer commencements and 476 exits meaning the foster carer pool is not growing sufficiently to meet demand. This suggests new recruitment and attraction strategies are not the answer to building the overall carer base, and additional efforts are needed to improve retention. The modest overall increases have not kept pace with the number of children and young people in OOHHC. In June 2024, the QFCC conducted a joint project with PeakCare which involved a comprehensive demographic analysis of foster carers in Queensland. Key report findings included a decline in traditional foster carers, demographic shifts impacting availability, and the need for systemic reforms. The report offers actionable opportunities to revitalise the foster care system, emphasising the importance of innovative and flexible approaches to foster carer recruitment, improved support systems, and greater flexibility for potential carers. The report concluded that collaborative efforts involving all stakeholders are essential to revitalise this crucial part of the child protection system.

Figure 9: Queensland carer households



Findings from the 2022–2023 *Queensland Foster and Kinship Care survey* of 155 Queensland exiting carers include that 39 per cent of kinship carers ceased their role due to reasons relating to Child Safety and 49 per cent of foster carers exited due to reasons relating to themselves and their family. A quarter of exiting kinship and foster carers were very dissatisfied with Child Safety’s engagement and response. Among all exiting carers, 38 per cent would not advise a friend to be a carer and 38 per cent would not return to the carer role later in their life. Interestingly, among respondents to our 2024 community perceptions survey, 39 per cent agreed they would consider becoming a foster or kinship carer and 86 per cent agreed they would take in a friend’s child in a time of emergency. A concern we regularly hear from foster and kinship carers is related to the rising cost of living. In 2023 the QFCC conducted a review into the carer allowance in Queensland to gauge whether it was sufficient. The findings suggested that, while the allowance has increased in line with the Consumer Price Index, it is still falling short of what carers need.

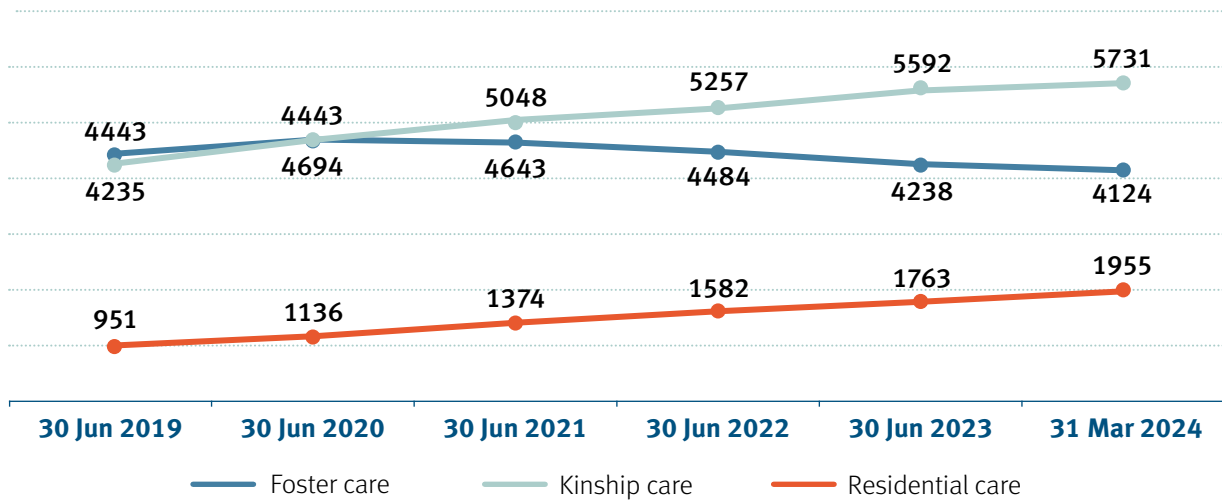


The ongoing shortage of foster carers is causing more Queensland children to be raised in residential care.

Over the past five years, the number of children living in OOHC has risen and the greatest increases have been for children placed in residential care. Between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023, the number of children placed in foster care decreased by 246 while the number placed in residential care increased by 181 children. Of the 1763 children in residential care as at 30 June 2023, 1.8 per cent were aged 0- to four-years, 15.9 per cent were aged five- to nine-years, 44.5 per cent were aged 10–14 years and 37.8 per cent were aged 15–17 years. The majority of young people aged 15–17 years (71.7%) who entered OOHC in 2022–2023 were placed in residential care. Queensland provides 41 per cent of Australia’s residential care placements despite only having 22 per cent of the nation’s children living in OOHC. For children 0–17 years, Queensland now has the lowest rate of children placed in family-based care in Australia. Queensland’s rates of family-based care are particularly low for young people aged 12–17 years (63.2% versus 78.4% Australia wide).



Figure 10: Children in care by placement type (30 June 2019–31 Mar 2024)



There has been a marked increase in children exiting care since 2018–2019 although the number of entries continues to exceed the number of exits. In 2022–2023, the total number of children and young people entering OOHc was 2804 versus 2217 exiting OOHc, a difference of 587 children.

The significant negative impacts of being raised in residential care were gathered during the 2024 residential care review, through both the QFCC lived experience panel and the Department’s *My life in care survey*, which although not a representative sample, showed that young people in residential care have demonstratively less access to necessities, are less likely to feel cared for or able to tell their carer when they are worried and have less privacy.

Table 6: *Life in care survey items*

Survey question*	Kinship care	Foster care	Residential care
I have the things I need to live comfortably	92.6%	95.8%	78.7%
I have access to tampons/pads	91.4%	87.6%	78.6%
I have access to underwear, socks and bras	91.9%	95.3%	76.3%
I have access to WiFi	88.6%	89.7%	59.0%
I feel that I can tell the person who looks after me when I am worried	73.5%	77.8%	50.4%
I feel that people care about me	85.9%	87.9%	57.4%
I have the privacy I need	88.6%	86.9%	68.9%

Source: Child Safety (2023). *My life in care* (unpublished survey)
 * Response percentages include those who selected ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’

Due to the rising numbers of children and young people in residential care, complaints of sexual exploitation and predation, and community concerns about youth justice incidents, Child Safety partnered with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak and PeakCare to deliver a review of the residential care system. Commissioner Twyford provided independent oversight and strategic advice. The review revealed significant challenges, including young people feeling unable to lead normal lives due to restrictive policies, mismatches with youth workers, lack of a sense of home, and difficulties engaging with culture and community. The review is complete, and the *Residential Care Roadmap* with 31 specific actions that government has committed to take is now public and being implemented. Despite this plan, since the government announced its review, the number of children in residential care placements has increased from 1759 and is now, at the end of 2023–2024, approaching 2000 children.

Sustainability challenges among residential care providers pose significant risks to the delivery of consistent, high-quality care for children and young people. Over the last 12 months the expenditure and number of individual providers of residential care services in Queensland has grown. As of 30 April 2024, there were 168 residential care service providers; by comparison, there were 150 residential care service providers at the same time in 2023. As of 30 April 2024, Child Safety invested \$898 million, compared to \$761 million at the same time in 2023.

The increased funding and increased number of care providers also indicates a structural change towards more, smaller care providers that are less likely to have capacity to respond to urgent demand surges. Over the last 12 months two major providers of care in Queensland have ceased their operations, resulting in urgent and

reactive changes to respond to the children and young people and their carers. At the time of closure, one of these providers was providing care to 863 children and young people and supporting 488 foster and kinship carers. PeakCare has advised that service provider exits were driven by funding to the sector not keeping pace with the increasing costs of service delivery.

As part of the residential care review the government has invested over \$3 million in a sector-led Workforce Strategy to improve services and outcomes for children and young people in residential care. Advice provided to the QFCC by stakeholders as part of the QFCC's Review of Residential Care was that sector providers needed to be properly resourced to provide training to boost their knowledge and capability, wellbeing support and to be able to create stable care teams.



Queensland continuing to operate without Child Safe Standards or a Reportable Conduct Scheme.

The QFCC acknowledges the work undertaken in developing the *Child Safe Organisations Bill 2024* to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission and emphasises the importance of timely implementation of this system in Queensland to respond to the needs of our children and young people and contribute to a nationally consistent child safe model. In the seven years since delivery of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to *Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission) Final Report*, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales have implemented coordinated Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Schemes.

Analysis of police data prepared for the Royal Commission suggested that child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts accounts for approximately five per cent of all child sexual abuse reported to police. Data collected through the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2021–2022 Personal Safety Survey estimates there are at least 195,200 people in Australia who were sexually abused before the age of 15 within an institution by trusted adults including foster carers, doctors, nurses, disability support workers teachers, priests and ministers, residential carers or youth justice workers. The National Redress Scheme provides support to people who experienced institutional child sexual abuse. Queensland's participation has involved a financial provision at 30 June 2024 estimated at \$409.4 million. In our 2024 workforce survey 83 per cent of respondents agreed that their organisation is child safe. This is a significant increase from 78 per cent in the 2023 survey.



Attention to concerns about the whereabouts of children in care.

As at 31 December 2022, there were an estimated 833 Queensland children in care staying at a place that was not their approved placement. This represents 7.6 per cent of all children involved with Child Safety. For more than nine years, the research has shown that children reported as absent or missing from care are at risk of a range of sexual harms, including exploitation, abuse, assault and rape. Rates as high as two out of five children and young people in residential care report having been a victim or at risk of child sexual exploitation. Behind these figures there are children whose futures are potentially forever altered at the hands of an adult who exploits them. We can and must do more to prevent, protect and respond to child sexual exploitation. Queensland took a big step forward with the release of *Safe & Sound in Queensland: Enhancing safety for young people who go missing from care*, a toolkit for workers who have an opportunity to prevent young people leaving their care placement. The importance of this work was

highlighted by a recent news article describing a QPS operation in Cairns which uncovered the exploitation of 54 children aged 11 years and older, many of whom had youth justice involvement.



The growing proportion of Queensland's child protection and family support budget funding OOHC rather than early intervention services.



While overall, funding for both family support and child protection services in Queensland has increased, in 2019–2020, 57.9 per cent of Queensland's child protection and family support budget was spent on the provision of OOHC and other supported placement services. By 2022–2023 this had risen to 72.1 per cent. This indicates an increasing trend towards crisis responses in child protection, rather than early intervention through family support that can reduce entry into the statutory system. The per child costs of crisis responses are significantly higher than earlier intervention, and without a deliberate commitment to increase early intervention, crisis responses and costs will continue to escalate. A placement cost of \$341 per night (in 2022–2023) equates to \$124,465 over one year, resulting in an annual cost to accommodate a child in OOHC which is about 15 times as much as the provision of a family support service.

While the average cost per night to place a child in an OOHC placement was \$341, the cost to place a child in a residential care service can be much higher than a foster or kinship care placement. Figures tabled in Queensland Parliament indicated that one child with high needs cost \$1.9 million per annum to place. In 2023–2024 the average cost of a foster or kinship care placement was \$48 per night (\$17,520 per annum) while the average cost of a residential care placement was \$1192 per night (\$435,080 per annum).



Ongoing challenges with attracting, supporting and retaining frontline staff.

While staff vacancy rates have been an ongoing issue there is recent evidence of improvements. The child protection and family support workforce continue to report feeling strained. Results from the QFCC's 2024 survey of frontline workers indicates that workload demands have worsened year-on-year. Only 45 per cent agreed their workload was manageable (compared to 57% in 2022, and 47% in our 2023 survey); 32 per cent agreed they were able to spend enough time with children, young people and their families to do their job well (compared to 30% in our 2023 survey), 53 per cent agreed they received the right amount of professional supervision to do their job well (slightly up from 49% in 2023); and 75 per cent agreed they received support from their colleagues/peers to do their job well (down from 87% in 2022, but consistent with 75% recorded in 2023). A further 39 per cent of respondents said they would recommend working in the sector to others and 16 per cent said they were intending to leave the sector in the next 12 months. Between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, the Queensland-wide Child Safety Officer vacancy rate rose from 68.54 FTE to 218.55 FTE. Over the past 12 months, however, it has dropped 43.8 per cent to 122.72 FTE.

There is no evidence of improvement in the issues identified in the 2021–2022 *Child Death Review Board Annual Report*, including agencies and services competing for staff and disparities in remuneration, incentives and leave provisions across government and non-government sectors creating increased staff movement with these issues being amplified in First Nations, rural and remote communities. Consistent with the Child Death Review Board findings our 2024 Principle Focus work identified that several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ATSICCOs) were reporting high vacancy rates and an inability to meet community demand. These workforce shortfalls will be the focus of a discovery review project in 2024–2025 to investigate what more might be done to address this in a more strategic way.



Queensland's OOHC and Youth Justice systems are **upholding the rights of the children and young people** they serve

When children are not able to remain safely at home, placing them in home-based care is considered to be in their best interests. OOHC that is safe and stable can help children and young people recover from experiences of maltreatment and most young people with care experiences go on to lead fulfilling lives. Overall, however, children and young people in care are more likely than others to experience homelessness, criminal justice interventions, unemployment, and less optimal physical, mental and educational outcomes. This emphasises the need for our Child Safety system to be responsive to the rights and wellbeing of children in care.

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 should address the full spectrum of interventions, from early intervention and prevention efforts, through to detention and support following an experience of incarceration. 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.

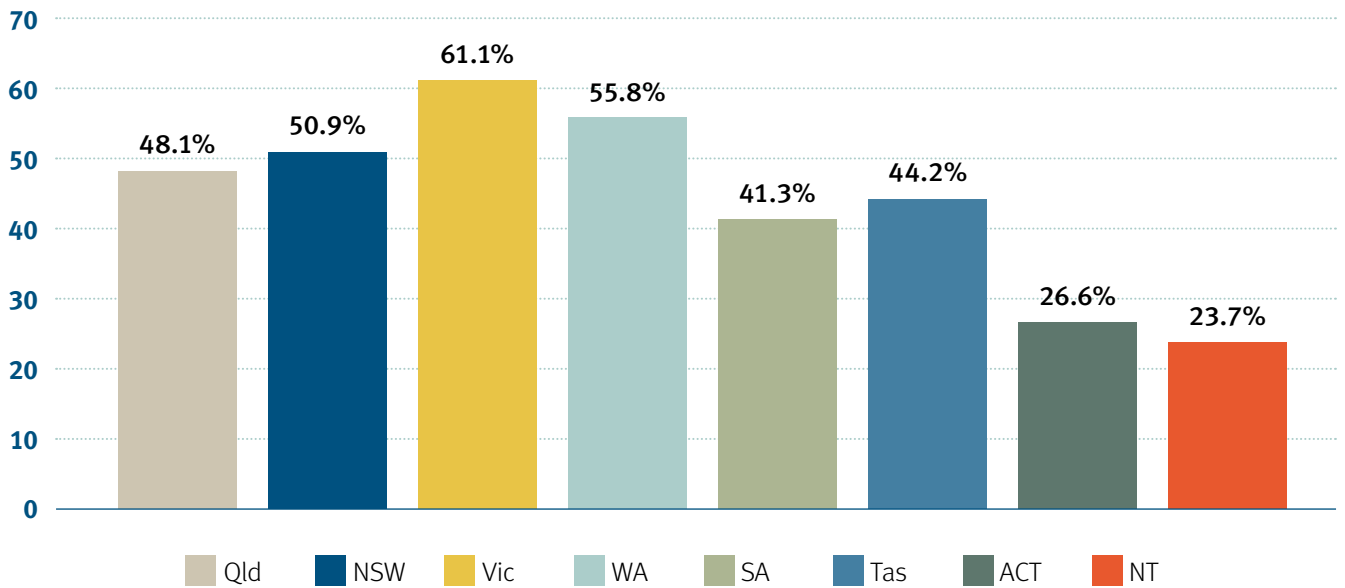
How does Queensland compare?



Queensland children and young people in OOHC experience more placements than children in some other states.

In 2022–2023, 48.1 per cent of Queensland's children and young people on a child protection order had exited care after 12 months or more with only one or two placements. Victoria had the greatest proportion of children and young people with only one or two placements (61.1%). While the proportion is low, it has been steadily improving since 2018–2019 when the Queensland rate was 37.8 per cent. The QFCC is planning a review to better understand factors affecting the placement stability of Queensland children which we hope will provide important information to improve stability for children in OOHC.

Figure 11: A comparison across Australian jurisdictions of the percentage of children and young people on a child protection order and exiting care after 12 months or more with only one or two placements (2022–2023)



Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on government services: Child protection services Table 16A.16*



Queensland continues to have a higher percentage of children and young people in OOHC meeting national reading standards compared to other reporting jurisdictions.

Of the three jurisdictions that provided data in 2023, the percentage of year 5 children subject to guardianship/custody orders who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for reading were highest for Queensland (73.0%) followed by Western Australia (68.2%) and South Australia (62.4%). The percentage of children and young people with a current education support plan has increased significantly over the past five years from 55.1 per cent in 2018–2019 to 80.5 per cent in 2022–2023.

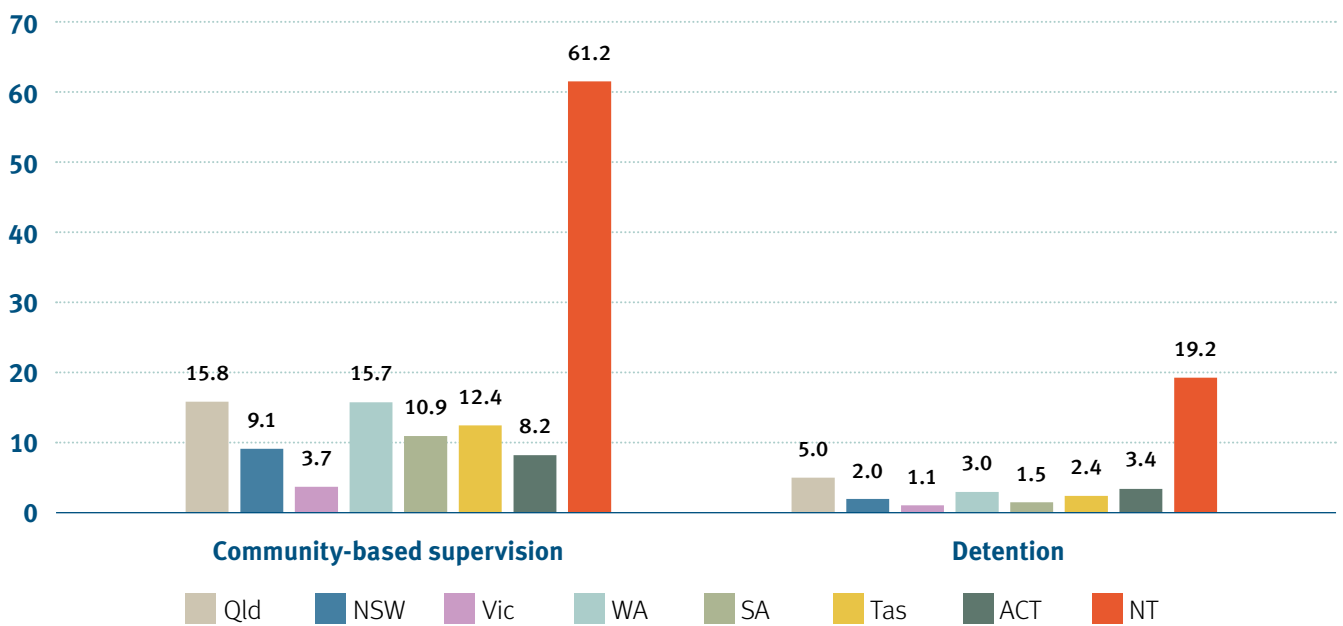




Queensland detains more children than any other state, has the highest rates of unsentenced detention and leads the nation for nights spent in custody.

During 2022–2023, Queensland had the second highest rate of young people in youth justice custody on an average day (5.0 per 10,000) and the second highest rate of young people under community-based supervision on an average day (15.8 per 10,000), behind the Northern Territory (Figure 12).

Figure 12: 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 (2022–2023)

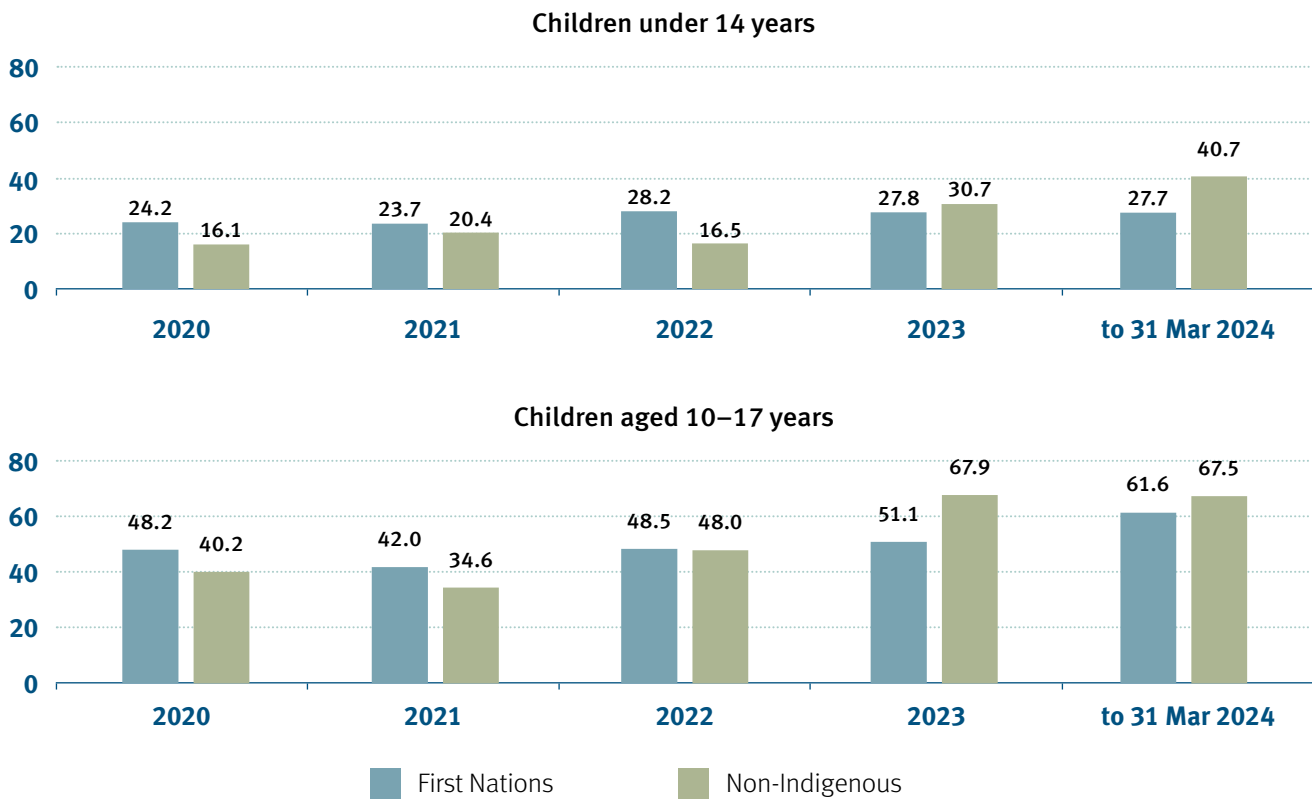


Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on government services: Child protection services Table 17A.1*

On an average night in the June quarter 2023, 306 Queensland young people aged 10 to 17 years were in a youth detention centre. This was the highest of all jurisdictions followed by New South Wales (186) and Victoria (100). Australian Capital Territory had the fewest (15). During 2022–2023, Queensland children spent the most nights in custody (103,399 total), followed by 71,298 total custody nights in New South Wales and 39,499 total custody nights in Victoria. More than a third of the national nights in custody were served by Queensland children.

Figure 13 presents changes in the average number of nights children spent in Queensland youth detention centres between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024 for children under 14 years and for all children aged 10 to 17 years. For both age groups, the average number of nights has increased over this time period. Since the year ending 31 March 2023, on average non-Indigenous children have been spending more nights in youth detention than First Nations children.

Figure 13: Average number of nights in a Youth Detention Centre, by First Nations status for children under 14 years and children aged 10–17 years



Source: DYJ (2024). Unpublished data request.

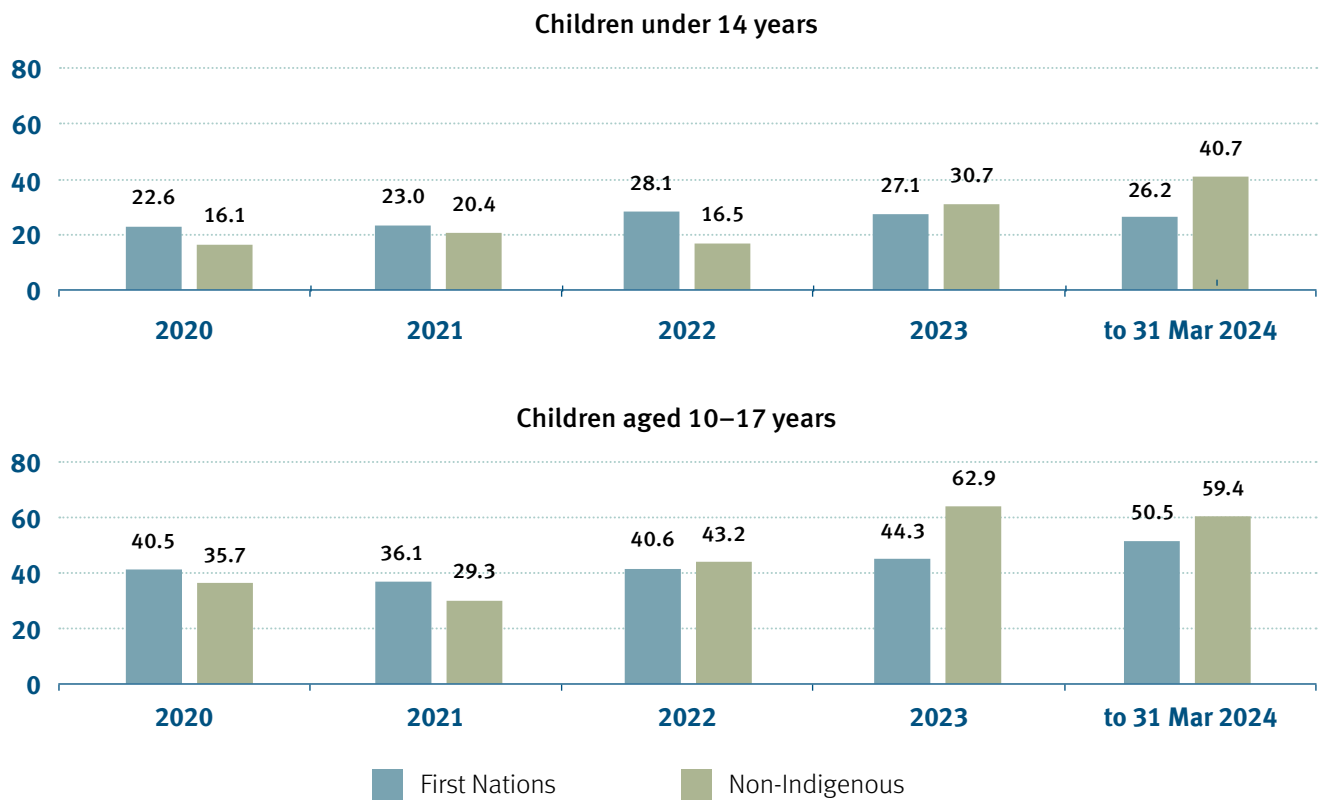
On an average day, 267 Queensland young people (87.4%) were in a youth detention centre on unsentenced detention. Queensland had the highest rate of unsentenced detention ahead of Tasmania (82.6%), Victoria (70.4%) and New South Wales (68.4%).

Figure 14 presents changes in the average number of nights children spent in unsentenced detention in Queensland youth detention centres between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024 for children under 14-years and for all children aged 10 to 17 years. For both age groups, the average number of nights has

increased over this time period. Since the year ending 31 March 2023, on average non-Indigenous children have been spending more nights in youth detention on unsentenced detention than First Nations children. The average number of days First Nations children spent in unsentenced custody increased by 10.0 days from 40.5 to 50.5 while for non-Indigenous children, the increase was 23.7 days from 35.7 to 59.4. When the time children spent in detention waiting to be sentenced was considered, half of those sentenced were not required to serve further time in custody.

When the time children spent in detention waiting to be sentenced was considered, half of those sentenced were **not required to serve further time in custody.**

Figure 14: Average number of nights in unsentenced detention in a Youth Detention Centre, by First Nations status for children under 14 years and children aged 10–17 years



Source: DYJ (2024). Unpublished data request.



What is working well or improving?



Most children and young people living in OOHC reported they feel cared for, safe and secure and happy.

In 2022 and 2023, the Queensland My Life in Care survey captured the experiences of 10- to 18-year-olds living in OOHC, most of whom were living in kinship or foster care (70% in 2022 and 72% in 2023). [Table 7](#) compares survey results across both years of the survey, showing that rates of young people feeling cared for, safe and secure and happy are generally either consistent across the two time periods or slightly improving.

Table 7: Young people's responses to select My Life in Care survey items in 2022 and 2023

	2022 % agree	2023 % agree
Felt sad prior to entering care	55%	49%
Felt scared prior to entering care	57%	58%
Feeling relaxed in care	55%	50%
Feeling safe in care	64%	66%
Feeling happy in care	70%	71%
Feel safe and secure in current placement	88%	89%
Feel as though people care for them in their current placement	78%	82%
Feel as though they have someone in their lives they can trust	94%	96%
In the past week felt happy	69%	74%
In the past week felt calm	64%	70%
In the past week enjoyed their day	68%	71%
Have privacy in their placement	82%	88%
Have the things they need to feel comfortable in their placement	89%	89%
Participated in recreational activities	98%	97%
Played a sport at least sometimes*	91%	80%

Source: Child Safety (2023). *My life in care* (unpublished survey)

*Response options changed slightly between 2022 and 2023.



The number of children and young people in care receiving National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support has almost tripled.

As at 31 March 2024, 3372 Queensland children and young people in OOHC had a verified disability. Additionally a growing number of children and young people in contact with Child Safety receive NDIS support. Between 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2024, the number of children and young people subject to ongoing intervention (either a child protection order or intervention with parental agreement) with an NDIS support plan almost tripled, rising from 1204 to 3553.



Most young Queenslanders obey the law.

There are over 570,000 young people aged 10 to 17 in Queensland, and most will never have an interaction with the Youth Justice system. Less than one per cent of the 10- to 17-year-old population (around 4000 Queensland children per year) will have youth justice contact.

Figure 15: Percentage of Queensland children aged 10–17 with and without a proven offence (2023–2024)



- 0.6%** of children aged 10–17 have had a proven criminal offence
- 99.4%** of children aged 10–17 have never had a proven criminal offence

Source: QFCC (2024). *Exiting detention community summary*

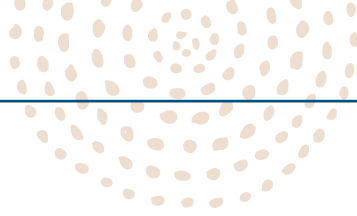


Queensland has measures in place to support the safety and wellbeing of children in OOHC.

In 2022–2023, the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) conducted 23,789 visits to 9909 children and young people at visitable locations. The majority of frontline workers who responded to our 2024 workforce survey believed that within their organisation the views of children and young people are listened to and valued (75%) and that decisions are made in children’s and young people’s best interests (77%).

The *Community Safety Plan for Queensland* was launched in April 2024 includes a range of funded initiatives targeting the root causes of crime. The plan includes \$261.4 million to establish a new therapeutic operating model at Woodford Youth Detention Centre to provide rehabilitation services aimed at reducing offender recidivism.

It also includes a \$267.5 million investment in the 2023–2024 State Budget for a range of initiatives to target the root causes of youth crime including Intensive Case Management and Intensive On Country programs. The Intensive On Country program is intended to deliver supports to young people and their families to deal with a range of needs that contribute to offending including mental and physical health, substance misuse and accessing accommodation. Further funding is also being invested in evidence-based programs targeting the root causes of crime.



The number of children and young people exiting OOHC to a permanency arrangement has decreased slightly—but they were less likely to return to care.

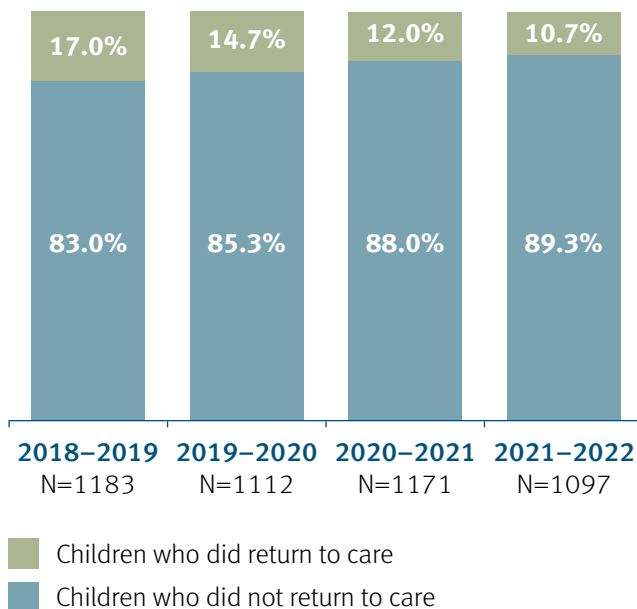
The number of children and young people exiting care to a permanency arrangement on a year-on-year basis has been reducing since 2018–2019 (7.3% decrease). However, among those children who exited, the percentage who did not return to care within 12 months has increased from 83.0 per cent in 2018–2019 to 89.3 per cent in 2021–2022 (Figure 16). In 2021–2022 in comparison with other states, Queensland’s rates of successful exits (89.3%) was lower than the rate for South Australia (96.0%), New South Wales (94.5%), Tasmania (93.3%) and WA (92.0%) but was higher than other jurisdictions.



The extension of support to children and young people leaving OOHC has improved.

In the year ending 31 March 2024, 477 young people aged out of OOHC. Commencing 1 July 2023, young people leaving OOHC have been eligible for Extended Post Care Support. Extended Post Care Support includes ongoing funding of the carer allowance to foster and kinship carers for young people who remain living with their carer family or financial assistance of up to \$16,000 per year paid directly to young people who are living independently. In January 2024, an ABC news broadcast, informed by data from Child Safety, reported that only around one-third of the 600 young care leavers eligible for the support had accessed it. Based on feedback from both young people entitled to the support and the sector, the Commission raised concerns about implementation delays, underestimated demand calculations, funding issues, information sharing barriers and a referral form that was still being finalised. In response, Child Safety quickly met with the sector and the impacted young people and promptly took corrective action to remediate these concerns. In June 2024, 345 carers who were caring for 18- and 19-year-olds who had remained living with them were continuing to receive the carer allowance. Over the 2023–2024 financial year, expenditure for this extension to the carer allowance was \$5.13 million. The program has been extended in the 2024–2025 budget.

Figure 16: The number of Queensland children aged 0–16 years exiting OOHC to a permanency arrangement and did or did not return



Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on Government Services*



Diversionary approaches are used more often and are an important component of effective responses to youth offending.

Between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023, the number of cautions administered by QPS increased slightly (3.1%) from 14,700 to 15,163 while the number of police-ordered restorative justice conferences was slightly lower (1.5%) reducing from 2085 to 2053. Research evidence suggests that the increased use of diversionary approaches such as cautions and restorative justice conferences has played a significant role in the decline in offender numbers both in Australia and internationally. Diversionary approaches reduce the potential criminalising effect of contact with the criminal justice system and subsequent reoffending and have been found to be particularly effective for young people engaged in low level offending. While it is pleasing to see these small improvements in the uptake of diversionary measures, we also note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are less likely to be diverted than non-Indigenous children, and this is an area of focus for both the QPS and the QFCC.

What needs further improvement?



The number of children entering care exceeding the number exiting and children staying in the system for longer.

While entries to care had been decreasing since their peak in 2019–2020, between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 there was a 3.7 per cent increase in the number of children entering OOHC and entry numbers have returned to around pre-COVID levels (Table 8).

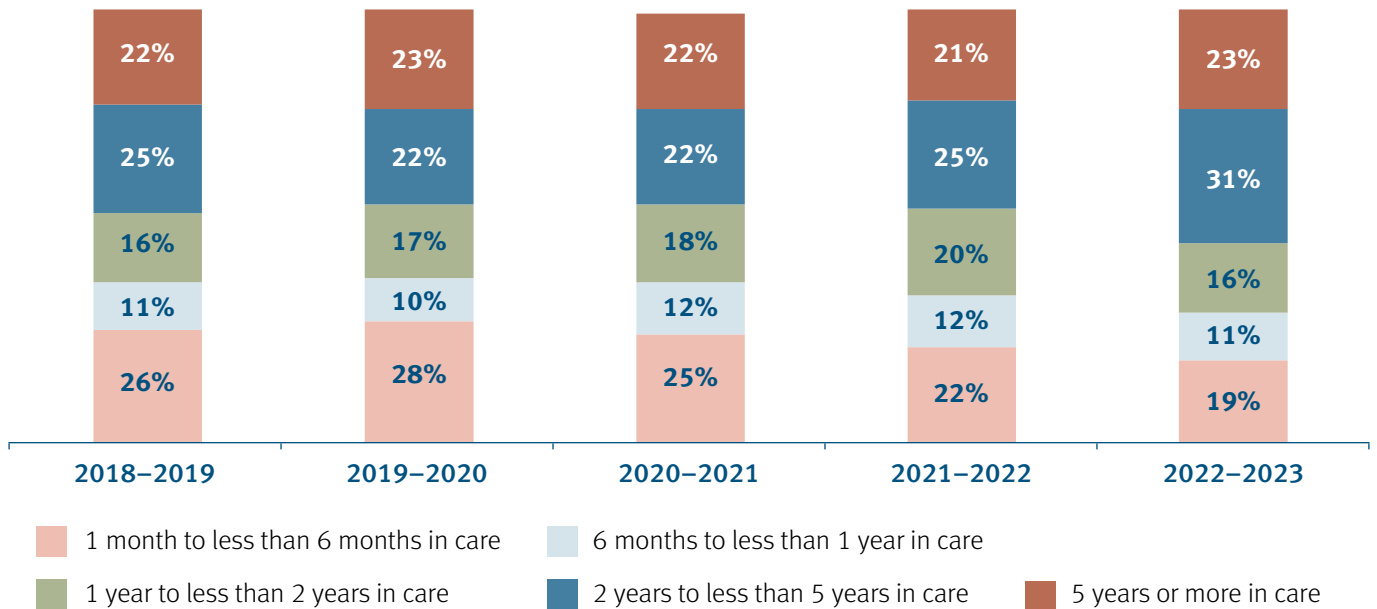
Table 8: Number of children entering and exiting OOHC

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	Year ending 31 Mar 2024	5-year change (2018–2019 to 2022–2023)
Entries to care	2807	3117	2958	2705	2804	2856	0.1% decrease
Exits from care	1786	1803	2022	2,09	2217	2294	28.4% increase

Source: DCSSDS (2024). Unpublished data request

Another factor driving demand is that Queensland children are spending longer in care. As shown in Figure 17, between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, the proportion of children aged 0–17 years who exited having spent less than six months in care dropped from 26 per cent to 19 per cent while the proportion spending two to five years in care increased from 25 to 31 per cent.

Figure 17: Trends in the proportion of children aged 0–17 years who exited care during the year by length of time spent in care



Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on Government Services*



Significantly increased substantiated abuse cases in OOHC.

For the 12 months ending 31 March 2024, 238 Queensland children and young people in OOHC were the subject of substantiated harm reports, an increase of 41 cases or 20.8 per cent from the 12 months ending 31 March 2023.

In 2022–2023, 1.5 per cent of Queensland children experienced substantiated abuse while they were living in OOHC, which was the third lowest behind the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania. The proportion of Queensland children with substantiated harm reports remained relatively stable from 2018–2019 to 2022–2023, ranging between 1.2 per cent and 1.7 per cent.



The small number of children and young people experiencing crime victimisation and the overlap between victimisation and offending.

In May 2024, among children and young people aged 0–17 years, 781 females and 557 males were recorded as victims of offences against the person (violent offences). The Childrens Court of Queensland in its 2022–2023 Annual Report highlighted that 47.9 per cent of victims of personal offences were 18 years or younger with 25 per cent aged 10 to 14 years while young males aged 10 to 14 were the most prevalent group of victims of robbery and related offences. A recent Queensland report which used police administrative data to examine the overlap between victimisation and offending among young people aged six to 17 years found that 32.7 per cent of children and young people with experiences of victimisation had also had police contact in relation to offending. Rates of overlap were higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (59.0%) versus non-Indigenous young people (29.7%).

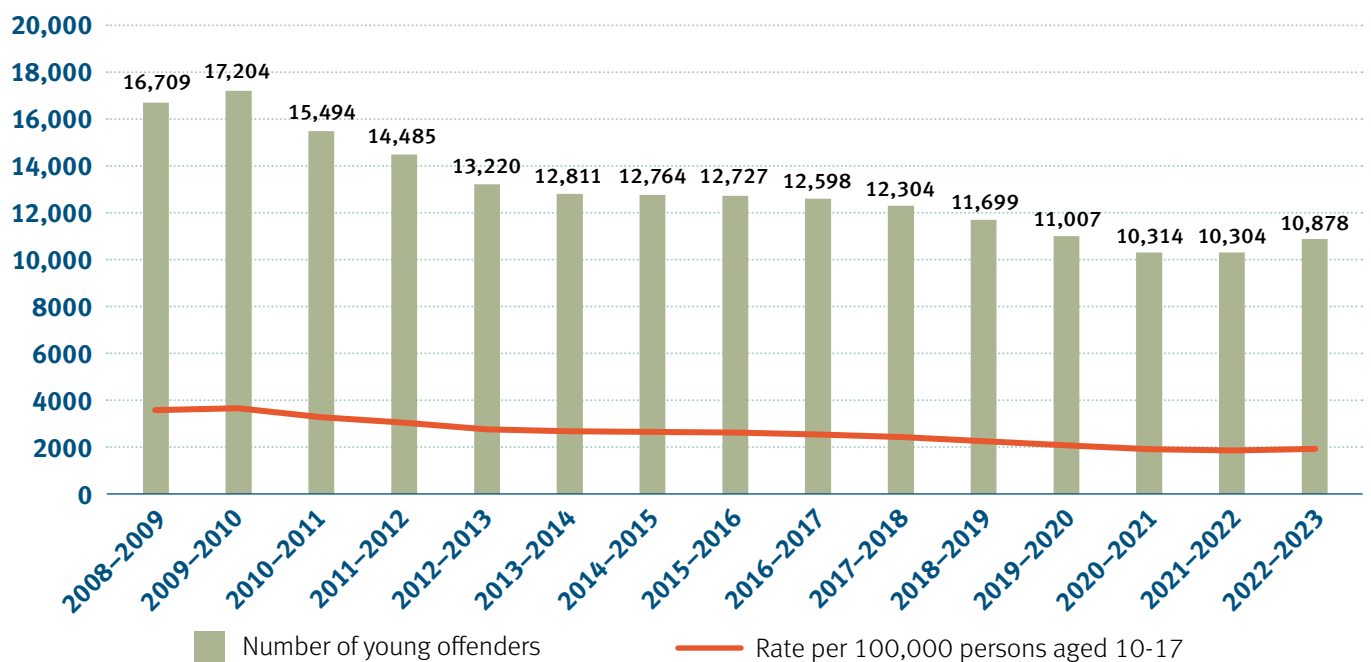


The community's concern about youth crime is high whilst overall there is a smaller number of offenders.

A common theme currently reported by the media is that Queensland is in the midst of a youth crime crisis. QFCC's media analysis in 2024 showed one quarter of media reports about youth crime included the word "crisis". QPS has stated there is ongoing fear of crime within the Queensland community suggesting there's more work to do to respond to community concerns. In 2024, the QFCC's *Community Perceptions Survey 2023* confirmed this and found that close to one in five respondents

considered crime and youth crime a key issue for parents and children in Queensland. Rates were highest among respondents living in the Far North region (27% versus 19% Queensland-wide). As shown in Figure 18, there has been a 34.9 per cent decrease in the number of unique young offenders proceeded against by QPS since 2008–2009. Between 2008–2009 and 2022–2023, the number of young offenders aged 10 to 17 years proceeded against by police decreased from 16,709 to 10,878. The rate per 100,000 persons aged 10 to 17 years has also dropped from 3575.8 to 1924.5 (Figure 18).

Figure 18: A comparison of the number of youth offenders aged 10–17 years and the rate per 100,000 persons aged 10–17 years

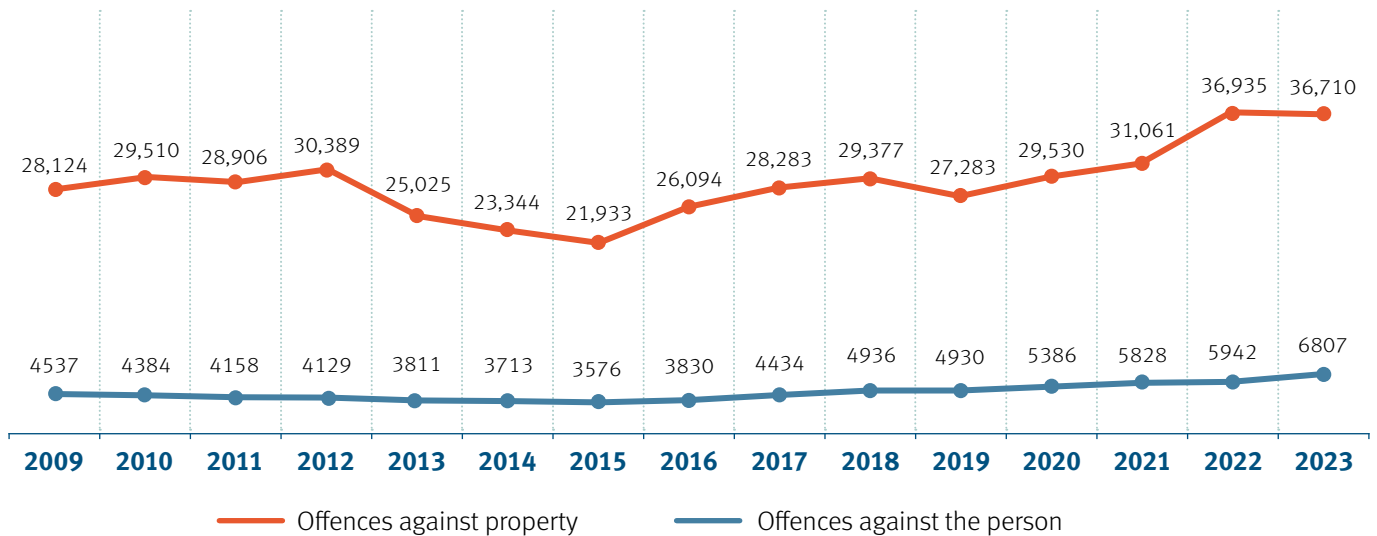


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024). *Recorded crime - offenders*

According to QPS data, the number of unique offenders aged 10 to 17 years in Queensland has been decreasing since 2009, while the number of offences perpetrated by young offenders has been increasing over the same time period. Figure 19 shows a 30.5 per cent increase in property offences and a 50.0 per cent increase in violent offences perpetrated by young offenders in Queensland between 2009 and 2023.



Figure 19: Number of offences against the person (violent crime) and number of offences against property recorded in Queensland where the offender was a person aged 10–17 years



Source: QPS (2024). Reported offenders number – QLD.



Care planning for children in state care either not occurring or not being recorded.

In 2024, the QFCC analysed the number of children in OOHc under short-term and long-term orders as well as the percentage who had case plans. While short-term orders have been increasing slightly as a percentage of all orders, according to data from the most recent reporting period, they now have returned to 2018–2019 levels.

Figure 20: Percentage of children subject to short-term versus long-term orders



Source: DCSSDS (2024). Our performance (website).

As at 31 March 2024, the percentage of children with a case plan was 93.7 per cent which was around the same as at 30 June 2019 (94.0%), however, the percentage of those with a current case plan has steadily dropped from 86.5 per cent of children to 78.2 per cent over the same time period.



The system not meeting the needs of children and young people, following concerns raised by frontline child safety workers.

The majority of respondents to the *QFCC's 2023 workforce survey* disagreed 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, with 73 per cent disagreeing (47% disagree and 26% strongly disagree), compared with 10 per cent agreeing (9% agree and 1% strongly agree).



Fair treatment of parents by Child Safety, following survey results revealing less than half feel recognised.

The Charter of Rights for parents was introduced in June 2022, developed with input from parents and kin. A 2024 survey conducted by the QFCC in collaboration with the Family Inclusion Network found that only 34 per cent of parents of children in OOHC were aware of the Charter. Results also showed that only 45 per cent felt recognised and respected by the child protection system, and only 47 per cent felt treated fairly. This survey, the first of its kind in Queensland, serves as a baseline for future enhancements. Child Safety is currently working to undertake a regular parent survey in 2024–2025 to understand how well the Charter of Rights for parents is being implemented, and findings from this survey will become a useful monitoring tool for the QFCC in relation to the experiences of parents in the Child Safety system.



The growing number of offences committed by young people living in OOHC and residential care.



As at 31 March 2024, 191 Queensland children aged 10 to 17 years were under youth justice supervision and subject to a child protection order. Of these, 149 (74%) were First Nations young people. The rate of children on youth justice orders was higher for those living in residential care, with an overall rate of 5.1 per cent for Queensland but with significant regional variation ranging from 2.5 per cent in the South East region to 13.8 per cent in North Queensland. Among young people within the youth justice system, rates of prior or current youth justice contact are high, with about one in five (20.7%) young people subject to youth justice supervision also currently held under a child protection order, and 58.2 per cent who had an interaction with the child protection system in the previous five years. During 2020–2021 Australia-wide, among young people in detention, 17.4 per cent have had a residential care placement, 16.1 per cent have had any foster or relative/kinship placement and 3.6 per cent have only had a foster or relative/kinship care placement (238). Rates of prior child protection contact are higher still among young people among the Collaborative Response Cohort, previously known as Serious Repeat Offenders (SROs). As at 31 March 2024, 134 SROs had an active child protection order, a rate of 2.3 per 10,000.



The increase in use of detention including unsentenced detention.

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 (Table 9). Between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024, the rate of young people subject to community-based supervision fell from 30.3 to 20.9 per 10,000 young people aged 10 to 17

while the number in youth justice custody on an average day increased from 4.2 to 5.4 per 10,000 young people aged 10 to 17 (Table 9).

Between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024, the proportion of young people in detention who were in unsentenced detention increased from 83.3 per cent to 86.2 per cent although this rate had fallen from the prior year.

Table 9: Number (and rate per 10,000) of children and young people within the Queensland youth justice system on an average day

	12 months ending 31 March					Change since 2020	Change since 2023
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024		
Community-based supervision	1579.5 (30.3)	1321.1 (24.7)	1279.9 (23.5)	1203.8 (21.5)	1195.9 (20.9)	24.3% decrease	0.7% decrease
Youth justice custody	218.0 (4.2)	217.9 (4.1)	280.0 (5.1)	300.3 (5.4)	311.0 (5.4)	42.7% increase	3.6% increase
Youth detention centre	200.9 (3.9)	214.6 (4.0)	273.3 (5.0)	281.3 (5.0)	285.9 (5.0)	42.3% increase	1.6% increase
Youth detention on unsentenced detention	167.3 (3.2)	188.4 (3.5)	235.3 (4.3)	248.8 (4.4)	246.5 (4.3)	47.3% increase	0.9% decrease

Source: DYJ (2024). Unpublished data request.





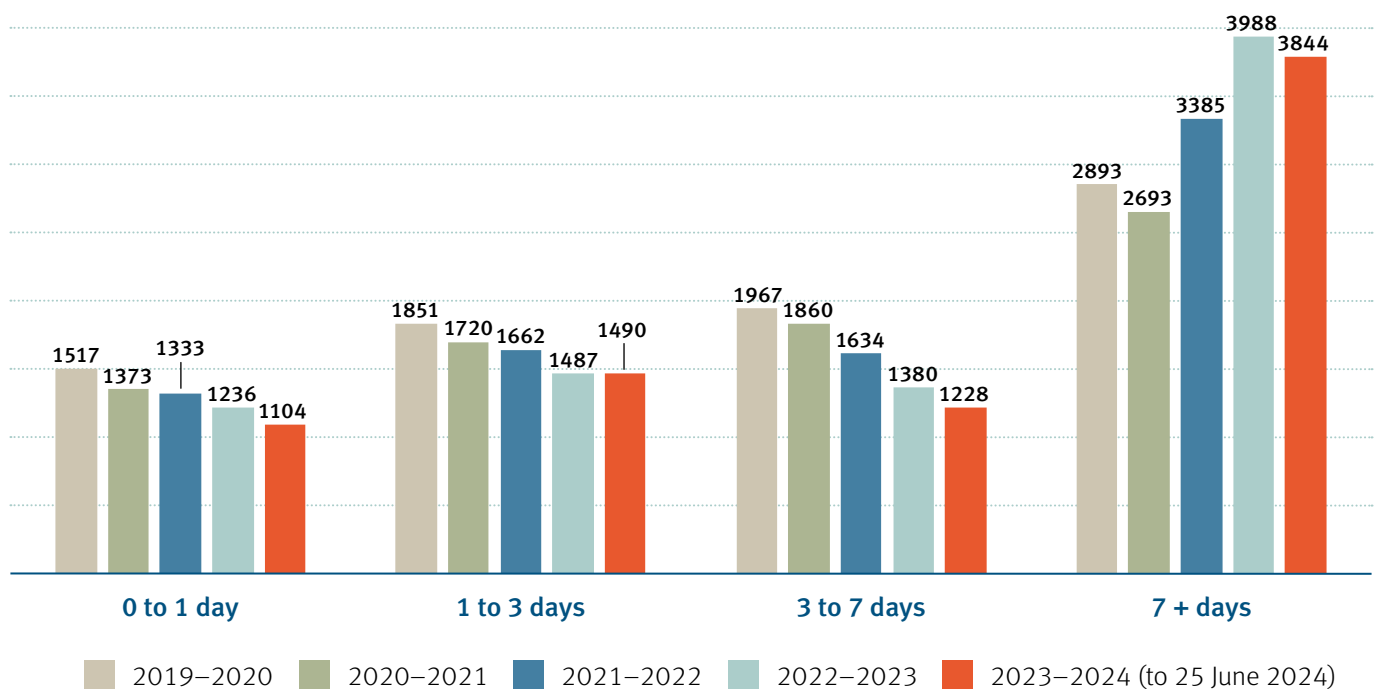
Continuing reliance on the use of watch houses to detain children is causing harm.

Monitoring undertaken by the QFCC in 2023, prompted by concerns from bodies like the OPG, revealed prolonged detention of young people, especially First Nations young people in watch houses. On 24 August 2023, the Queensland Parliament passed urgent amendments to the *Youth Justice Act 1992* concerning the holding of children in police watch houses. Amendments allow lawful holding until beds are available in youth detention centres, increased transparency in prioritisation and transfer decisions, and provided a human rights declaration override. In November 2023, we released a report highlighting increased detention durations, with significant rises in stays lasting eight to 14 days and 15 days or more. Within the report, we reviewed the cases of 30 young people who were identified by the OPG as having spent extended time in a watch house in 2022 and 2023 (including 17 young people who had spent 10–28 days and five young people who had spent

29+ days). The review found that tougher bail conditions, slower Childrens Court clearance rates and overcrowded youth detention centres were driving extended watch house stays. The most recent data on watch house admissions (Figure 21) indicates that over the past five years, the overall number of admissions dropped 6.8 per cent from 8228 to 7666 and that the number of admissions has dropped for every duration except for “7+ days” where there has been a 32.9 per cent increase. In 2023–2024, one in two admissions to a Queensland watch house led to the young person being detained for seven days or more.

In 2023–2024, one in two admissions to a Queensland watch house led to the young person being detained for seven days or more.

Figure 21: Number of admissions of young people aged 10–17 years and length of stay in custody in police watch houses



Source: QPS (2024). Unpublished data request

The QFCC has been advised of a number of reforms led by the DYJ to improve conditions of young people awaiting transfer to youth detention centres. These include \$149.2 million for the delivery of Wacol Youth Remand Centre in late 2024, to reduce the number of young people in watch houses and to support stronger access to education and therapeutic services; the operation of the Caboolture Watchhouse Education Support Hub from December 2023, providing targeted and wraparound support (including health and education support) for young people on remand; and the extension of watch house support staff and the contract with Murri Watch to provide support to young people in regional watch houses. The Fast Track Sentencing Pilot has improved court clearance rates with an additional 170 files finalised each month, and the median number of days dropping from 53 to 46 days in pilot sites.



Data capturing on the use of separations in youth detention centres.

Separations are a restrictive practice to ensure safety and welfare and are strictly monitored according to the *Youth Justice Regulation 2016* and *Human Rights Act 2019*. The most recently reported data is provided for the 2021–2022 financial year where there were:

- 30,255 separations between six and 12 hours
- 519 separations between 12 and 24 hours
- 83 lasting over 24 hours.

As part of the department's youth detention infrastructure expansion project, a replacement system is being scoped to ensure comprehensive, real time reporting capability for separation and other restrictive practices within youth detention centres. The QFCC will monitor this data once it becomes available.





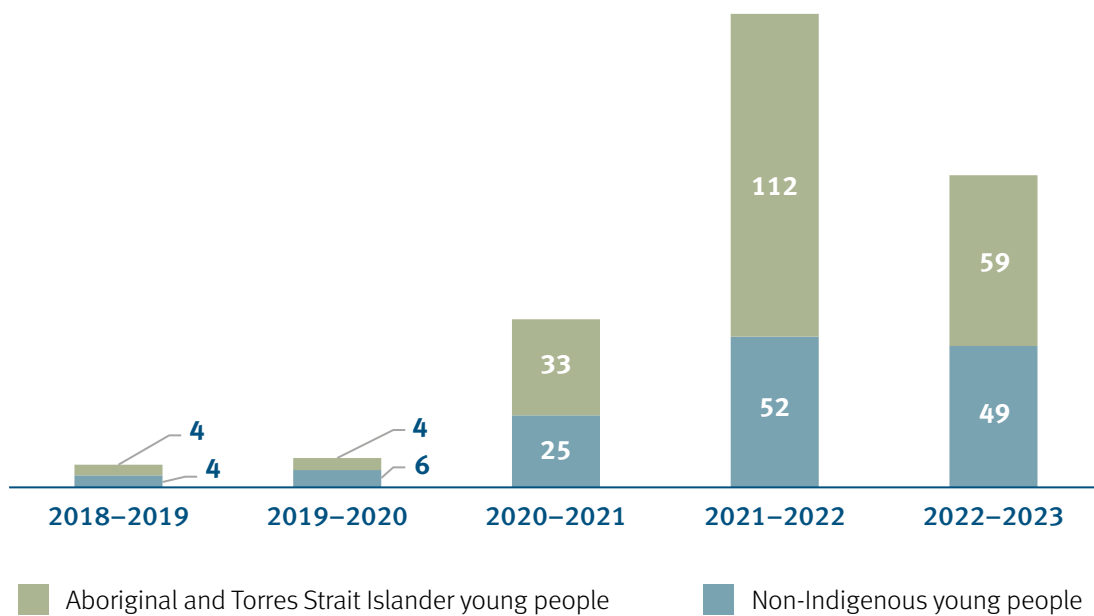
The significant rise in self-harm and suicide attempts among young people in custody in Queensland.

In 2021–2022, there were 164 incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide. In 2022–2023, there were 108 incidents, with 49 involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and 59 involving non-Indigenous youth.

Queensland’s model of youth justice is not effectively rehabilitating offenders.

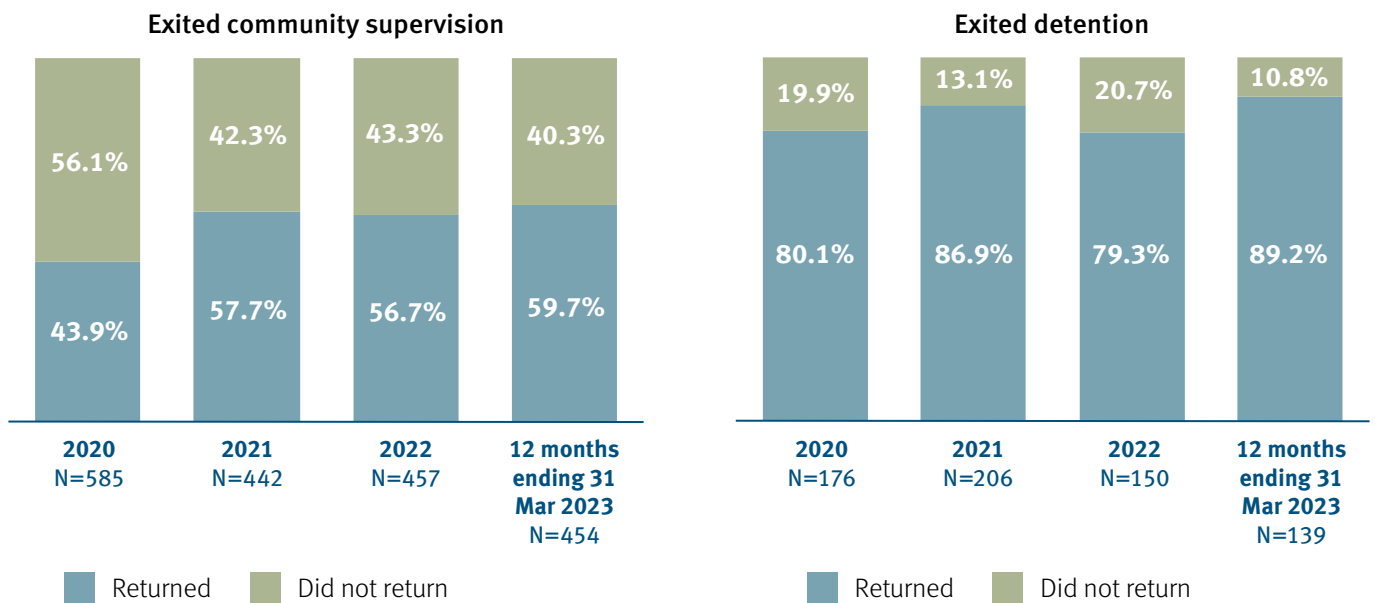
Of the 454 young people exiting community supervision in the 12 months ending 31 March 2023, 59.7 per cent returned to the youth detention system within 12 months. Of the 139 young people exiting youth detention in the 12 months ending 31 March 2023, 89.2 per cent returned to the youth justice system within 12 months. These return rates have been steadily increasing since 2020 (Figure 23).

Figure 22: Number of incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide in custody not requiring hospitalisation in Queensland, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status



Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on Government Services. Table 17A.19*

Figure 23: Rate of return of young people aged 10–16 years to the youth justice system (community supervision or youth detention) within 12 months

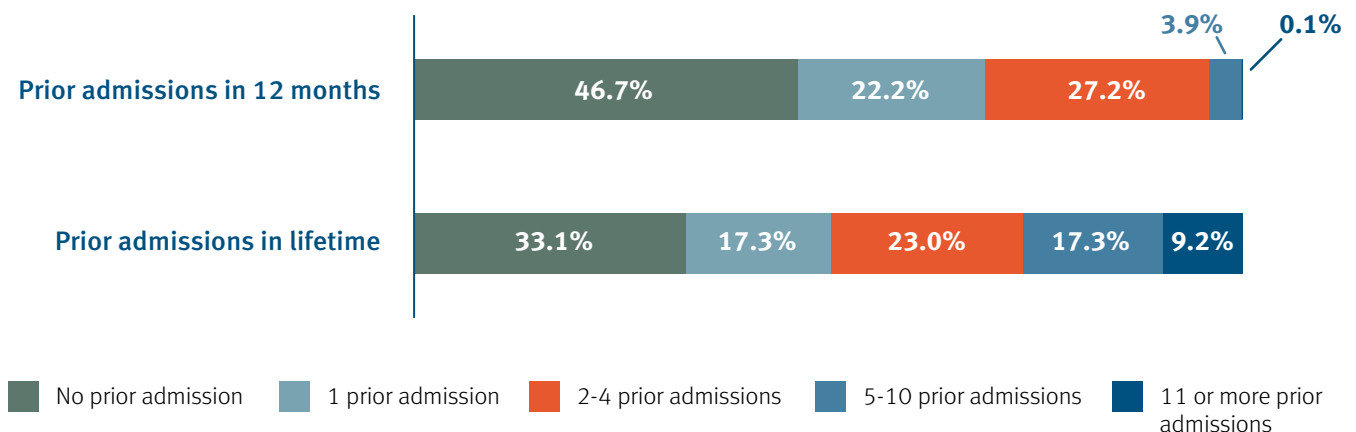


Source: DYJ (2024). Unpublished data request.

The following two figures examine the extent to which young people aged 10 to 17 years who have been either under community supervision or in youth detention have had repeated contact with the system by examining number of prior entries (past 12 months and lifetime).

Figure 24 presents the number of times the 1615 young people who were under community supervision (for 12 months ending 31 March 2024) had prior entries to community supervision. In the past 12 months, almost half had no prior entries however 4.0 per cent had five or more admissions. In terms of lifetime prior entries, only one third had no prior entries and 26.5 per cent had five or more prior admissions.

Figure 24: Proportion of young people aged 10–17 years under community supervision (N=1615) disaggregated by total number of prior entries (past 12 months and lifetime) for 12 months ending 31 March 2024



Source: DYJ (2024). Unpublished data request.

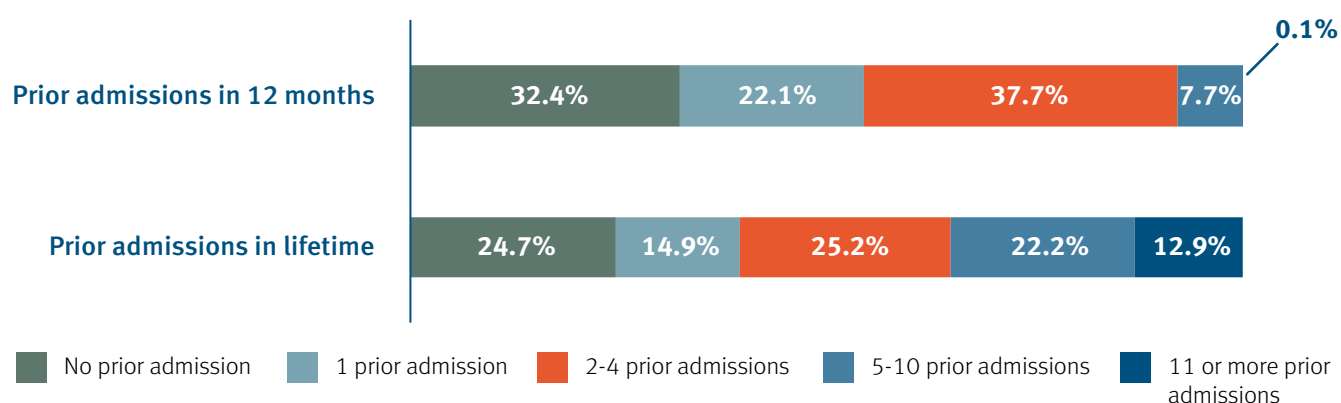
Figure 25 presents the number of times the 990 young people who were in youth detention (for 12-months ending 31 March 2024) had prior entries to youth detention. In the past 12-months, almost one third had no prior entries however 7.8 per cent had five or more admissions. In terms of lifetime prior entries, less than one quarter had no prior entries and 35.1 per cent had five or more prior admissions.

Findings from our previous work have raised concerns about the effectiveness of detention, supports and services in rehabilitating and reintegrating young people following detention. In April 2023, we commenced a review into young people’s experiences of exiting detention. The report was informed by the experiences of 66 young people who had been in detention in Queensland, families of young people who had offended, and 44 frontline workers from across Queensland. Young people spoke about the causes that drove them to offend—poverty, housing instability, family breakdown and exposure to DFV, and drug and alcohol use and dependence—and how the support they received both in detention and on release was ineffective at addressing these factors. Transition plans were described as being ineffective in helping young people reintegrate into their communities, with young people saying they did not receive enough support to build strong and lasting relationships with people who could aid their rehabilitation.

Others said their transition plans were not tailored to their needs, locations and circumstances; took too long for actions to be implemented; and did not offer intensive support to address their needs.

Young people said they feel their communities view them negatively, making them feel disconnected, unvalued and unwanted, which they said discouraged them to participate positively within their communities. Young people clearly articulated that their rehabilitative prospects were better when they could build a strong, trusting and enduring relationship with a support worker or a member of their family or community, and that this was more effective than participation in a short-term, generic or universal program. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds reported that for them, culture was a central element of creating strength, support and direction. The report made two recommendations to strengthen post-detention transition programs for a dedicated 12-month period, with programs forming part of a broader developmental approach to crime prevention that invests in supports and services to address the root causes of offending.

Figure 25: Proportion of young people aged 10–17 years in youth detention (N=990) disaggregated by total number of prior entries (past 12 months and lifetime) for 12 months ending 31 March 2024



Source: DYJ (2024). Unpublished data request.

Consistent with the conclusions made in our *Exiting youth detention* report, the Queensland Audit Office (QAO) found that the 72-hour transition plans from youth detention, which are the primary approach to supporting young people through their exits, were not based on evidence and that Youth Justice could not explain the rationale for only planning for the first 72-hours after a young offender's release. The newly released *A Safer Queensland: Youth Justice Strategy* notes these will be 'improved' however a more concrete action plan, with strategies and achievable targets will be required in order to effect improvements. Transition

plans need to be longer than 72-hours and provide wrap around supports for the young person and their families. The QAO also identified that data on access to education services and rehabilitation programs are not clearly captured for serious repeat offenders. Of the serious repeat offender files that were sampled for the purposes of their audit, 18 per cent (nine out of 50) had no record of any rehabilitation programs being delivered to the young person to prevent their reoffending. Effectively addressing the drivers of offending behaviour requires evidence-based strategies and programs tailored to the needs of the young offender.





Queensland’s OOHC and youth justice systems are **meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 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 OOHC has worsened in Queensland and every Australian state, with the exception of the Territories. The disproportionality ratio for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland was 5.74 in 2022–2023. This means there were 5.74 times more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC than would be expected given the proportion of First Nations children and young people in the state’s population. [Table 10](#) shows that Queensland’s disproportionality ratio was higher than Tasmania (3.92) and the Northern Territory (2.16) but lower than all other states and the Australian Capital Territory.

Table 10: Disproportionality ratios for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged 0–17 years in OOHC across Australian jurisdictions

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023
NSW	6.32	6.52	6.71	6.79	6.79
Vic	15.03	15.75	16.04	16.01	16.25
Qld	5.36	5.39	5.50	5.66	5.74
WA	8.14	8.45	8.60	8.73	9.11
SA	7.31	7.57	7.62	7.81	7.82
TAS	3.33	3.40	3.59	3.64	3.92
ACT	9.35	9.98	9.38	9.99	8.62
NT	2.15	2.13	2.19	2.19	2.16

Source: Productivity Commission (2023) *Table 16A.9*

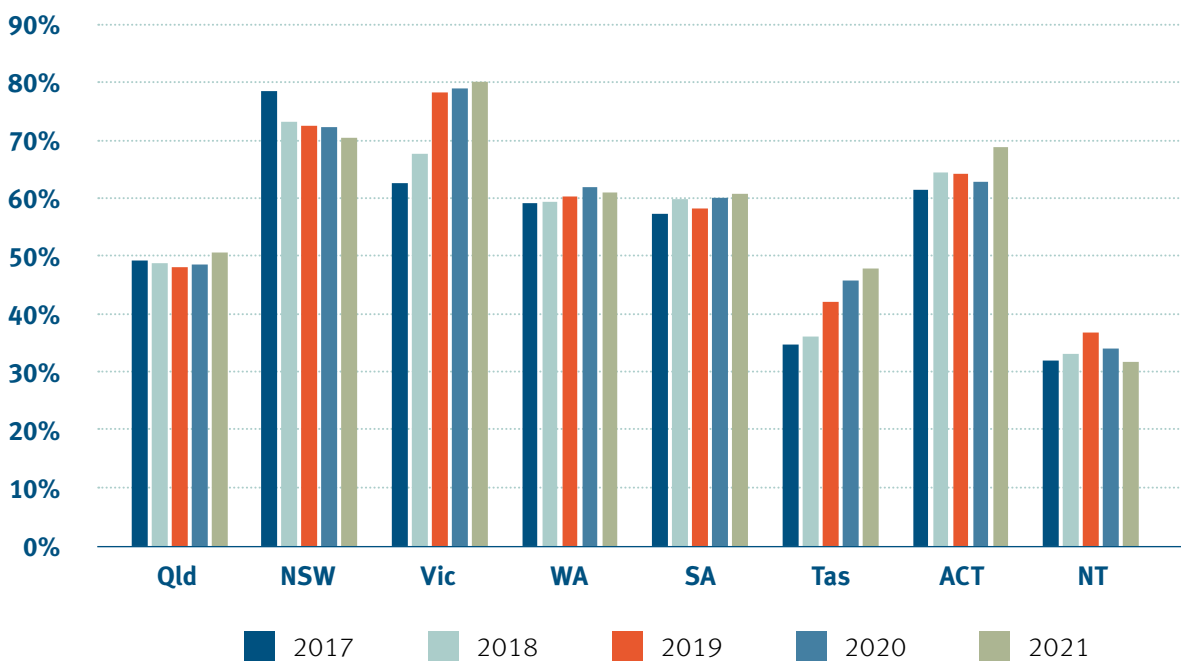


The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people within the child protection system is affected by their interactions with other systems and services.

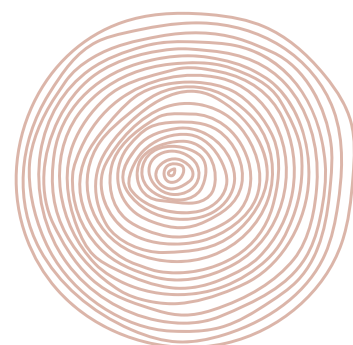
Australia’s *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* outlines targets to reduce inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a target date of 2031. Reducing disproportionate representation in child protection is one of the agreement’s 17 socio-economic outcome areas. Other targets relate to early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, housing, safe communities, and disproportionate representation in youth justice. Disproportionate representation in statutory systems does not occur in isolation.

Queensland has one of the lowest percentages of children living in OOHC who were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers. Compared with children and young people living in other jurisdictions, a lower percentage of Queensland First Nations children living in OOHC are placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers. The proportion has been relatively consistent for the past five years and in 2021, was 50.7 per cent which was lower than the percentage for all other jurisdictions except for Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Figure 26: Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carer



Source: AIHW (2022). *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle indicators*



What is working well or improving?



The increase of kin placement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC.

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. Dedicated kinship teams and greater engagement with ATSICCOs have resulted in more First Nations children in OOHC being placed with First Nations kin: 27.9 per cent in 2022–2023, up from 23.9 per cent in 2019–2020. In September 2023, the Queensland Government announced as part of its Breaking Cycles Action plan that, in partnership with Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), they would be trialling a program, *Family Caring for Family* to increase the number of First Nations children placed with family and/or kin.



Delegated Authority in selected Queensland locations helping to restore and recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination and having positive benefits for children and families.

The Queensland Government started trialling Delegated Authority arrangements late in 2020, in three communities in the Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland region. QATSICPP and Child Safety have partnered to develop a 10-year blueprint for implementing Delegated Authority in Queensland: *Reclaiming our Storyline*. The rollout was extended in 2023–2024, with 14.5 per cent of Outsourced Service Delivery investment being made with ATSICCOs (an increase of 2.3 percentage points since 2022–2023). This included 1.8 per cent in investment for Delegated Authority with nine organisations. As of 30 June 2024, the Director-General has approved delegations for a total

of 197 children since delegated authority arrangements commenced. Delegations include functions and powers related to reunification (placement with parent), case planning, and family contact and cultural connection.

As highlighted by the QFCC's 2022–2023 Principle Focus regional snapshots, *Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland is the only Queensland Child Safety region tracking towards meeting the Closing the Gap target 12 to reduce the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC by 45 per cent*. Stakeholders continue to credit the strong relationships between ATSICCOs and Child Safety and the impact of greater self-determination through Delegated Authority and other place-based approaches. In 2022–2023, the region's Finding Kin Team increased the number of First Nations children in OOHC being placed with First Nations kin by 3.8 per cent and reunified 41 children with their families. There was also a positive trend away from placements in residential care (13 fewer children in residential care in 2022–2023). The role of Delegated Authority in achieving strong reunification is undisputable – 90 per cent of reunified children were within a Delegated Authority catchment. Stakeholders from the QFCC Government Reference Panel appreciated the collaborative nature and strong outcomes of Delegated Authority processes.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's readiness for school is improving.

According to the Australian Early Development Census, 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 Australian Early Development Census censuses.



Supporting Queensland's First Nations languages through Government investment.

In 2023, 151 Queensland state schools and six Outdoor Environmental Education Centres were investigating, developing or implementing a First Nations language program in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Forty-four of these schools are at the 'fully implementing' stage and are engaged with teaching and learning in 26 different First Nations languages. Language programs are being developed for a further 29 different First Nations languages, making a potential total of 55 distinct First Nations languages being taught in coming years.

Closing the Gap outcome 16 is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing. At the baseline time period (2018–2019), 26 languages were spoken with five considered strong. No additional data is currently available to track progress towards this goal.



A small but growing number of First Nations children are subject to Permanent Care Orders (PCOs) or orders granting long-term guardianship to a suitable family member or another suitable person.

In May 2023, amendments to the *Child Protection Act 1999* broadened the definition of kin to include members of family groups who were people of significance as well as people regarded under either Aboriginal tradition or under Island custom as kin of the child. Long-term guardianship orders to suitable family members or other suitable persons are seen as a positive trend when options for reunification are exhausted. Our prior review found that all PCOs were made to kin that in most cases provided continuation of relational and placement stability for the child.

Table 11: Number of First Nations children subject to different types of orders

	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023
First Nations children on PCOs	8	28	29
First Nations children on order granting long-term guardianship to a suitable family member	39	41	64
First Nations children on order granting long-term guardianship to another suitable person	17	18	24

Source: Director of Child Protection Litigation (2023). *Annual Report, 2022–2023*

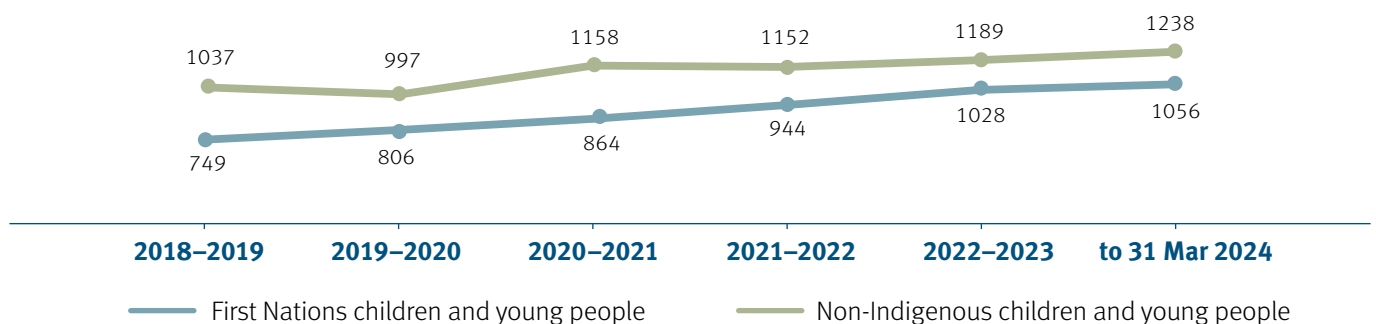
Although numbers remain small, there has been a gradual increase in the use of PCOs and orders granting long-term guardianship to a suitable family member or another suitable person for First Nations children. As at 31 March 2024, 77 First Nations children in OOH were subject to a permanent care order in Queensland. The increase in these types of matters is reflective of the reforms focussed on promoting positive long-term outcomes for children in the child protection system that commenced on 29 October 2018 as a result of the *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017*. We will be monitoring the impact of legislative changes on orders in the coming months.



The growing number of First Nations children exiting care.

While the number of First Nations children entering care continues to exceed the number exiting care, the number of First Nations children exiting care grew by 37.2 per cent between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023. This compares with a 14.7 per cent increase for non-Indigenous children over the same time period.

Figure 27: Number of children and young people exiting OOHC by First Nations status



Source: DCSSDS (2024)

Table 12: Number of reunifications of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

	Number of reunifications
2018–2019	203
2019–2020	173
2020–2021	194
2021–2022	214
2022–2023	239
1-year increase	11.7%
5-year increase	17.7%

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are reunified with their families, it is almost always successful. While the number of reunifications is low, it has been gradually increasing over time.

In 2022–2023, 239 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were reunified with their families and 215 (90.0%) did not return to care within 12 months. Through our Principle Focus work we spoke with regional Child Safety staff and community-controlled organisations across two communities in the Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland regions 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.

What needs further improvement?

Residential care placements continue to increase across the state for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. As at 31 December 2022, there were 715 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in residential care. By 31 December 2023, this had risen to 794 children, an 11.0 per cent increase, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children now comprise 43.4 per cent of all children in residential care. Among all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC, more than one in eight live in residential care.

Child protection and youth justice Closing the Gap targets are not improving.



Target 11 of Closing the Gap is to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10–17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031. In 2021–2022 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait young people (10–17 years) in detention was 40.9 per 10,000 from a baseline of 41.2 per 10,000 in 2018–2019. The trend for the target shows no change from the baseline and is not on track. 😞

Target 12 of Closing the Gap is to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0–17 years old) in OOHC by 45 per cent by 2031. In 2022 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children in OOHC was 45.0 per 1000 from a baseline of 37.0 per 1000 in 2019. Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target is worsening. ❌

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care continues to exceed the number exiting. Between 2018–19 and the year ending 31 March 2024, the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young

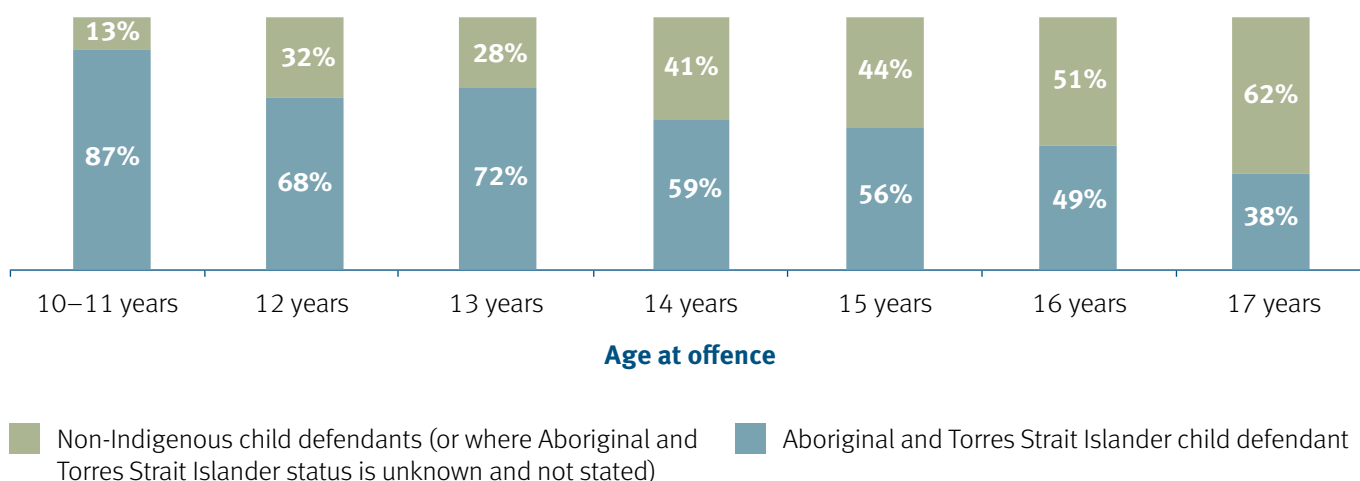
people entering OOHC increased by 13.2 per cent from 1213 to 1373, whereas the number exiting OOHC increased by 41.0 per cent from 749 to 1056. For every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person who exited OOHC in the year ending 31 March 2024, 1.3 entered.

There is a lack of culturally strong responses and service systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who experience DFV. The *Healing our children and young people framework* recognises that the deep wounds that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience because of DFV require a significant healing response. Many DFV responses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities use a crisis response model. While this response ensures victim survivors in crisis get consistent, clearly communicated responses, it also applies pressure for the separation of families and pressure on women as victims to take on the sole responsibility for their child's safety and wellbeing. The *You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup* Report found that experiencing domestic and family violence negatively impacted childhoods, behaviours and the ability to form healthy relationships as adults, and that interaction with the child protection system exacerbated distress. The report called for increased cultural and healing practices and expertise in responding to trauma. DFV services in Queensland are therefore primarily involved in removing perpetrators from victims with little to no consideration that a child's cultural identity exists within their family and community. In addition, this approach does not provide opportunities to change or understand their impact on their children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be 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 in a way that does not involve judicial intervention. Police can deal with offenders using court action (laying charges that must be answered in court) or non-court action (such as cautions, conferencing or issuing fines). The rate of proceedings by police using court action against young people dropped between 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 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% of proceedings in 2021–2022 compared with 46.3 per cent for non-Indigenous young people). In 2022–2023, 87.0 per cent of 10- and 11-year-old defendants, 68.0 per cent of 12-year-old defendants and 72.0 per cent of 13-year-old defendants were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Figure 28). In 2022–2023, in comparison with non-Indigenous children, 10- to 13-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more than 45 times more likely to be under community-based supervision more than 51 times more likely to be in detention.

Figure 28: A comparison of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of distinct child defendants, by age at offence (2022–2023)



Source: Childrens Court of Queensland (2023)

The disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Queensland youth justice system is ongoing. Despite comprising only 8.2 per cent of all children and young people aged 10 to 17 years in Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accounted for 53 per cent of all child defendants who were convicted in a Queensland court in 2022–2023. Additionally, between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023,

over-representation in the conviction rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, as compared to other young people increased. In 2019–2020 they were 10.9 times more likely to be convicted but by 2022–2023 this had increased to 13.0 times more likely. Figure 29 shows the extent of the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the Queensland youth justice system.

Figure 29: Rates per 10,000 young people involved with the Queensland youth justice system on an average day, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (For 12 months ending 31 March 2024)



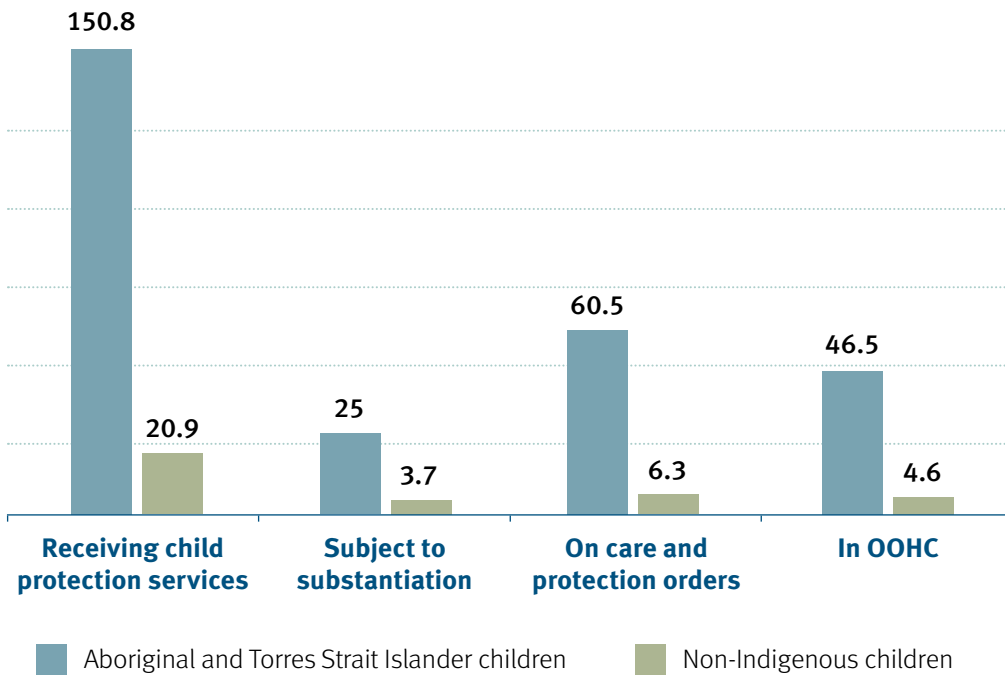
Source: DYJ, 2024

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be overrepresented throughout the Queensland child protection system. [Figure 30](#) demonstrates the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people at various stages of the child protection system. In 2022–2023, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander children nationwide were 7.2 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be receiving child protection services, 6.8 times more likely to be subject to substantiation, 9.6 times more likely to be on a care and protection order and 10.1 times more likely to be in OOHC.



Figure 30: Rates per 1000 children and young people at various stages of the Queensland child protection statutory system, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (2022–2023)



Source: AIHW (2024)

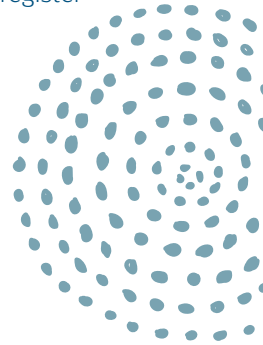
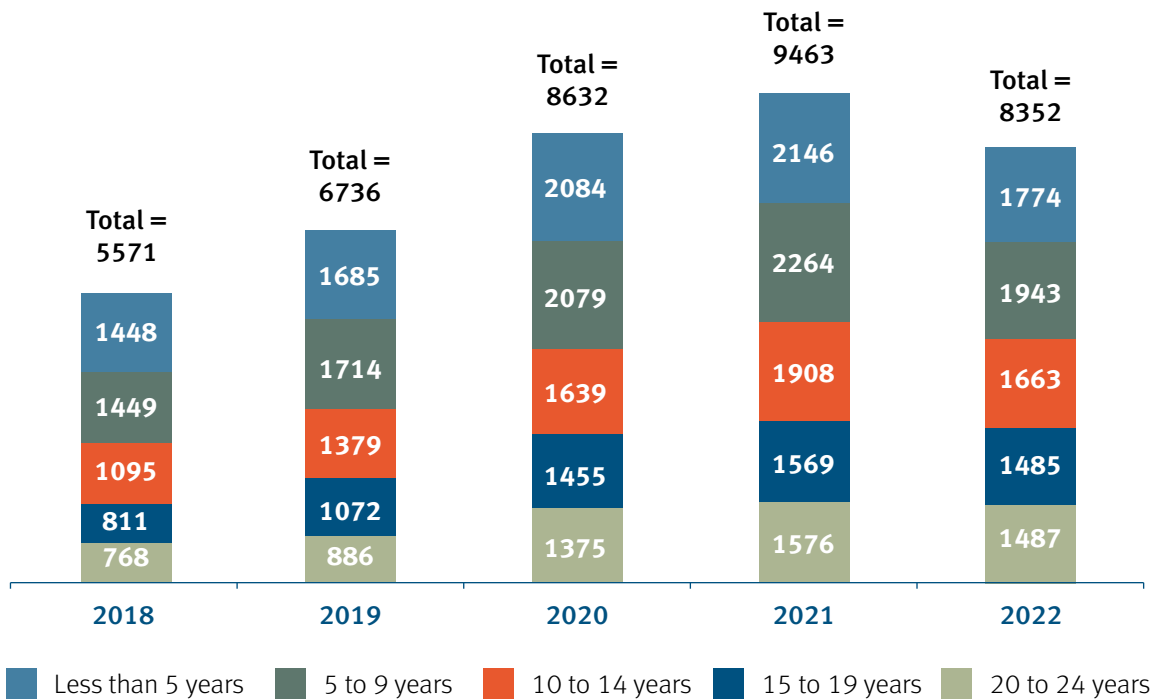
Insights from our Principle Focus work suggest that while there are still opportunities to drive down disproportionate representation within the secondary and tertiary child protection system, the greatest drivers to eliminate disproportionate representation are the universal, secondary and tertiary supports across the Our Way wellbeing domains (health, home and environment, learning and skills, safety, culture and connections, mental health and emotional wellbeing, empowerment and economic wellbeing). Governments (state and federal) must urgently address the deficits outlined in the Closing the Gap reforms. Without the fundamental shift across all areas, over-representation is unlikely to be eliminated.



The high number of First Nations children on Queensland’s public housing register.

There is substantial overlap between involvement with child protection and need for public housing. Children living in public housing are more likely to face a life trajectory characterised by greater contact with the health system, greater early life developmental vulnerability and greater contact with the criminal justice system. Studies of families on public housing waitlists indicate the experience leaves them feeling powerless, extremely stressed and unable to plan ahead. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of First Nations children aged up to 24 years on the Queensland housing register increased from 5571 to 8352. This means they have been approved for public housing but not yet received an offer of housing. Despite substantial commitments from both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to enhance social and affordable housing supply there is more work to be done.

Figure 31: The number of First Nations children and young people (up to 24 years) on the Queensland housing register



Source: QFCC (2024) *Growing Up in Queensland*



The increased gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous infant mortality rates.

The annual rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infant deaths has been decreasing, on average, by 0.9 per cent per year since 2009 compared with an annual 2.4 per cent reduction for non-Indigenous infants. While decreases in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate mirrored decreases in the non-Indigenous mortality rate over much of the period, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rate increased in the last three years whereas the non-Indigenous rate plateaued. The infant mortality rate in 2022–2023 in Queensland remains significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants than non-Indigenous infants (6.6 compared with 3.6 per 1000 births).

The requirement for kinship carers to hold a Blue Card is a significant barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being raised safely with family and retaining their connection to Country and culture. Planned legislative

change is welcomed by the QFCC. The QFCC is pleased by the recent amendments introduced to strengthen the operation of Blue Card laws and remove the requirement for kinship carers to hold a Blue Card when caring for kin. The QFCC’s review of the Queensland Blue Card system found the Blue Card scheme’s focus on employment suitability, rather than suitability to care for kin, gave limited consideration to the child’s best interests and presented a significant barrier for prospective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers. A key finding was that removing the Working with Children screening process for kinship carers would not put the safety of children at risk but would rather increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family allowing them to be raised safely with family and retain their connection to Country and culture. Various stakeholders from the QFCC Government Reference Group have observed first-hand the impediment the Blue Card system presents for identifying and engaging kinship carers.

The Queensland child protection and family support system is a **collaborative and accountable system**

Successful implementation of reforms and overall system improvement requires broad cooperation, and shared responsibility and governance. This is noted in *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* which states “state and territory governments manage child protection systems, but we are all responsible for keeping children safe. This includes all levels of government, non-government organisations, service providers, researchers and Australian families and communities”. *Safe and Supported* 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 with many organisations operating to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children and their families. Queensland has a long history of leadership in this space including the work of Bruce and Denise Morcombe who have built the nation-leading ‘Australia’s Biggest Child Safety Lesson’ and ‘Brighter Futures’ program through their remarkable Daniel Morcombe Foundation Inc. It is also the home state of Hetty Johnston AM GAICD who has established Bravehearts and is a strong advocate through the National Office for Child Safety. Queensland hosts Jon Rouse APM and his international leading work to uncover online child exploitation at the Brisbane-based Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation as well as the work of Bob Atkinson who was a Commissioner of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and who remains a tireless advocate for the rights of victim-survivors. The *Putting Queensland Kids First*

strategy, launched in June 2024, prioritises resources and expenditure on services and supports for children and their families. The QFCC is pleased to see the strategy centres children and seeks to strengthen prevention and early access to services.



There is increasing transparency about the performance of Queensland’s youth justice and child protection systems.



The DYJ has taken steps to enhance transparency by publishing internal evaluations of its programs online. So far 12 evaluation reports for nine programs have been published. These include evaluations of the transition to success program, restorative justice conferencing, On Country and the electronic monitoring trial. A further four evaluations will be delivered in 2024. The department has an ongoing evaluation plan to understand what works. Guided by ongoing evaluation and new evidence, the DYJ has proposed that if programs or services prove ineffective, they will be discontinued.

Like all other Australian jurisdictions, Queensland contributes to all national reporting including the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services* and the AIHW's *Child Protection Australia*. Queensland is one of a select number of jurisdictions (along with Western Australia and South Australia) reporting nationally on the number of children on guardianship/ custody orders achieving national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Child Safety also reports publicly on the proportion of children in care awarded a certificate by the end of year 12 as well as post-school employment and further study destinations. Child Safety has also recently published findings from its annual *Life in Care* survey of children and young people living in OOHC. These findings provide insight into the impact of the system on children and young people. Other administrative data regarding the Child Safety system is published with visualisations and explanations which support understanding of the system on the department's *Our Performance* website.

The investment in Unify, a new case management system for child safety, should deliver increased capacity and capability for collaborative best practice. Child Safety is finalising the update of its Integrated Client Management System and will continue the progressive roll-out of Unify, its new data system in 2024–2025. Unify is client-centric and will improve information sharing and collaboration across Queensland Government agencies.

What is working well or improving?



Cross-portfolio coordination efforts continuing to support the child, family and youth justice systems.

Several governance groups and integrated responses tasked with leading and coordinating components of the child, family and youth justice systems continue to provide an authorising environment for collaborative responses at the frontline:

- 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, provides strategic guidance and oversight of the implementation of the Our Way strategy.
- The Our Way Interagency Strategic Partnership group, led by Child Safety, including Deputy Directors-General from relevant government agencies, fosters cross-government action to eliminate the disparity of First Nations children, young people and families in child protection.
- Child Safety's Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) team system, enables a coordinated response to the protection needs of children. Core members of the SCAN team system are Child Safety, the QPS, Queensland Health and Department of Education.
- 10 Domestic Violence High Risk Teams, led by DJAG, enhance responses to DFV through time-critical information sharing, safety management for victims and increased line of sight of high-risk perpetrators.
- The recently expanded Stronger Communities initiative/ Early Action Group brings together QPS and other key government representatives to provide intensive coordination of services to young people aged eight to 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.
- Multiagency collaborative panels (MACPs) enable government and non-government agencies to provide intensive case management and holistic support for young people identified as high risk or who are requiring a collaborative response through a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach. MACPs 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.
- The Youth Crime Taskforce has now been permanently established and led by the QPS. The Taskforce is focused on building intensive multiagency case management of high-risk repeat youth offenders.
- Youth Co-responder teams (YCRTs) include 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 13 regions of Queensland, between 2020–2021 and 2023–2024, YCRTs have had nearly 96,000 engagements with young people, including checking their compliance with bail conditions and following up to ensure they are accessing the right services. In 2023–2024, three out of five engagements were with First Nations young people.



The growing number of opportunities for children and young people to contribute their perspectives on issues that affect them.



In the QFCC's 2024 Community Survey, respondents were divided about whether 'young people have the opportunity to contribute to discussions about issues that affect them', with 45 per cent of respondents agreeing and 37 per cent disagreeing. Nevertheless, the amplification of the voices of children and young people is increasingly valued and sought by a number of Queensland Government and non-government agencies.

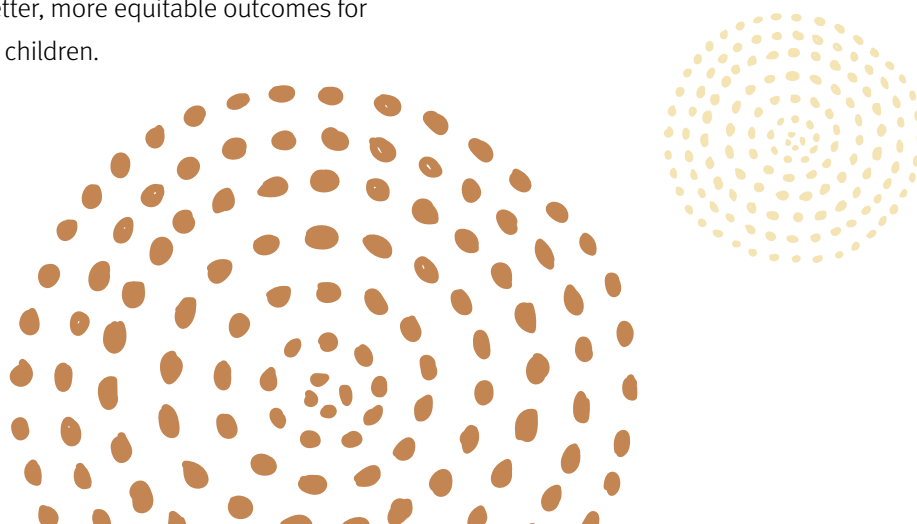
Child Safety is running the annual *My Life in Care* survey to better understand the experiences of Queensland children and young people who are currently living in OOHC. A residential care expert panel, comprising young people with lived experience of residential care was established to inform Child Safety's review of the

residential care system; one of the key actions from the *Roadmap for Residential Care* has been to establish a ministerial youth advisory group to give young people in care a greater say about their future. Other opportunities accessible to all young Queenslanders include the YMCA Queensland Youth Parliament which has been established to enable young people aged 15 to 25 years to have their voices heard about issues that matter to them and their communities. The Australian Institute of Play hosted a childhood summit in June 2023 with 43 child presenters followed by a workshop in August 2023 to unpack key themes, issues and solutions. Young Queenslanders have also had the opportunity to engage with the QFCC's Young Leaders Summit in Cairns and to participate in the QFCC's Youth Summit which occurred in April 2024 during Youth Week. The QFCC's Youth Summit was an opportunity for young people to speak directly to decision-makers about all that is important to them allowing for robust solutions-driven conversations.



Queensland has a growing number of accountability mechanisms for monitoring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. *Safe and Supported* emphasises the importance of all agencies collecting, sharing and measuring safety and wellbeing outcomes for young people to measure progress and to provide tailored responses to keep children safe. One of its focus areas is improved information sharing, data development and analysis. In addition to contributing to the work of the Productivity Commission and the AIHW, Queensland has a growing number of accountability mechanisms for monitoring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people which include:

- The QFCC's *Growing Up in Queensland 2024* report and Data explorer which are comprehensive reference points for researchers, policy- and decision-makers, containing data and evidence about key issues affecting Queensland families. Acknowledging the regional diversity within Queensland, both the report and the dashboard provide data at both the state and regional levels.
- The *Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas*, which maps information on children and young people up to age 24 in communities across Australia, enables the visualisation, analysis and monitoring of health and wellbeing metrics for children and young people.
- The QFCC's *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*, which details the state of children's rights in Queensland. The report analyses how Queensland upholds children's rights, and it identifies the changes needed to embed a child rights approach across government policy, legislation and systems to deliver better, more equitable outcomes for Queensland children.
- The QFCC's *First Nations Children's Report* which showcases stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families who are thriving when they can fully enjoy their right to family, community, culture and Country. The report demonstrates the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and shows the positive outcomes that are possible when their rights are upheld.
- The QFCC's Principle Focus dashboard. In August 2021, the QFCC released the *Principle Focus* report and committed to monitor and examine the dynamics and drivers of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across Queensland's child protection system. To increase accountability and transparency, in 2024, we released our Principle Focus dashboard. The dashboard involves an in-depth, rights-based analysis of the ATSI CPP implementation across the system and draws on a state and regional data.
- Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts produces an annual *Closing the Gap Snapshot Report* which includes a visual presentation of data that is informative, accessible and easy to understand, so that First Nations Queenslanders can consider what is happening at a local level, to make decisions about their futures.
- The Child Death Review Board conducts systemic reviews following the death of a child connected to the child protection system.



What needs further improvement?



The well-known issues driving performance in our statutory systems providing clear guidance about what needs to improve.



A review of more than 3000 recommendations issued over twelve years in 61 state, territory and Commonwealth reports has identified the six core issues plaguing Australia's child protection and youth justice systems. These systemic issues have been consolidated in a recent report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and Australian Human Rights Commission. The report's thematic analysis identified six systems-level issues, repeatedly identified within the evidence-based recommendations of reports. The repetitiveness of these themes illustrates both that these core issues have not yet been successfully addressed by governments but also the complexity of addressing such systems-level barriers.

Identified issues were:

- Inadequate cross-system information sharing, collaboration and coordination across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Limited First Nations partnership and self-determination across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Lack of mechanisms for oversight, monitoring and transparency across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Limited child protection and youth justice workforce capacity and support.
- Inadequate levels of investment across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Limited opportunities for child voice and participation within the child protection and youth justice systems.

The consistency of these systems-level themes over this 12-year period suggests there is a wealth of knowledge, insight and data on the services and supports that would be effective in reducing the contact that vulnerable children and young people have with child protection and youth justice.



Greater accountability and transparency regarding children in watch houses.

Due to the separation of responsibilities across government agencies, complicated by a web of administration and bureaucracy, our review found that no one agency is directly responsible or accountable for the time a child spends in a watch house nor the impact this has on their wellbeing. The review found that accountability was complicated by compartmentalised roles across police, courts, and youth justice; an umbrella of 10 oversight and complaint bodies charged with discrete responsibilities for the wellbeing of children.

We acknowledge the commencement of the Independent Inspector of Detention Services and the reviews now occurring and encourage prioritised responses to the individual and systemic outcomes of these reviews.



First Nations data sovereignty is limited in Queensland.

There have been some steps towards First Nations data sovereignty in Queensland, with the recent passing of the *Public Records Bill 2023 (Qld)*, to update the current legislation that is silent on the interests and perspectives of First Nations peoples. The Bill comes into force in December 2024 and includes the establishment of a First Nations Advisory Group to enshrine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making into the management of public records. Queensland Government agencies hold substantial data assets (information or knowledge in any format or medium) about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (collectively or individually), which have a variety of uses, including measuring the performance of services, prioritising funding and monitoring the outcomes of services. However, the right of First Nations peoples to exercise ownership of data through collection, creation, access, analysis and interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse has been limited. The exclusion of First Nations peoples from exercising ownership over data can result in skewed data narratives that have a deficit focus and whose to which access is restricted.

The Youth Justice Reform Select Committee, which was examining ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime, was dissolved without finalising its report and recommendations, although there is an ongoing need for its work in Queensland. Formed in October 2023, the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee was established to conduct an inquiry to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime. The committee conducted 26 meetings, 13 public hearings and nine public briefings, as well as receiving more than 200 submissions. This bipartisan committee was dissolved in April 2024, having only tabled an interim report. The dissolution of the Committee highlights that the coordinated and holistic approach to youth justice reform that is needed to improve outcomes for community safety and for young people is not yet operating effectively in Queensland. Further work is needed to achieve a coordinated service system that delivers evidence-based reforms to safeguard and rehabilitate children so they are less likely to interact with the justice system.

**This report is supplementary to the QFCC's 2023–2024 Annual Report.
Please visit www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/annual-report for a full reference list.**





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