

Sector insights paper

APRIL 2025

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Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



Queensland
Government

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare updated youth justice report

YOUTH JUSTICE

OVER-REPRESENTATION

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has published the updated youth justice report, which provides a national comparison of youth justice supervision rates, including community-based supervision and detention. Data linkage projects are underway to improve future reporting about how young people with youth justice involvement interact with other government agencies and support services. These include the Child Wellbeing Data Asset and National Crime and Justice Data Linkage Project.

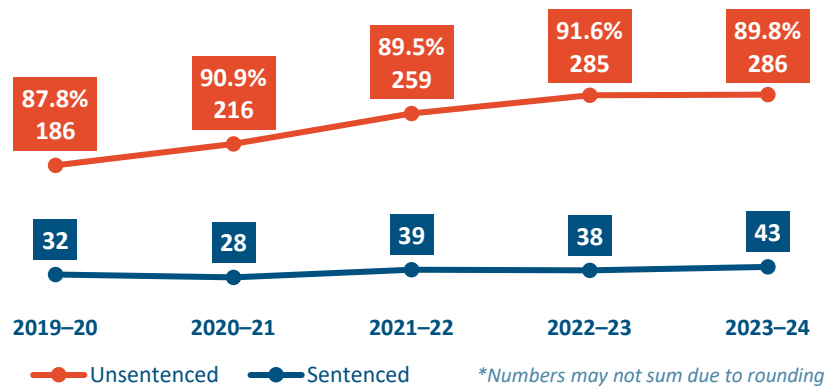
Detention: trends and insights

- Young people in detention were more than twice as likely as adults in prison to be unsentenced. Nationally, on an average day, 84% of 10-17 year olds in detention were unsentenced, compared to 39% of adults in prison.

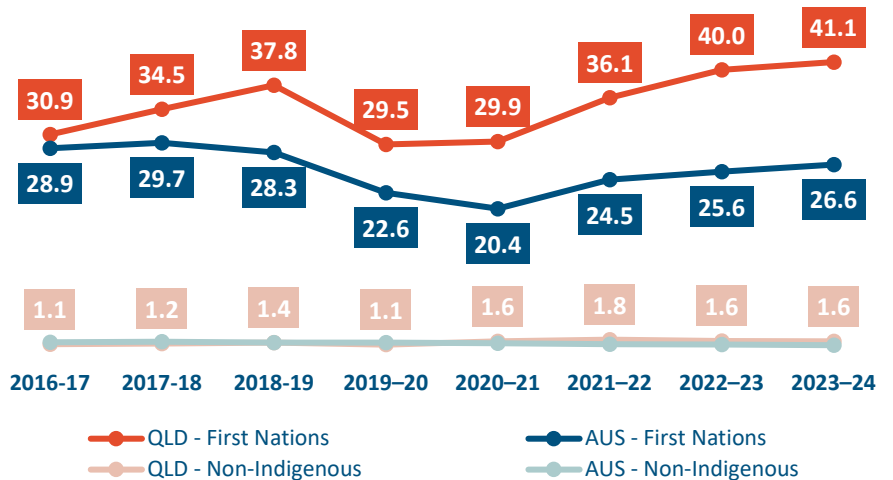
Between 2019–20 and 2023–24:

- Nationally, the detention rate for non-Indigenous young people decreased from 1.4 to 1.0 per 10,000, while increasing for First Nations young people from 22.6 to 26.6 per 10,000. In Queensland, the detention rate for non-Indigenous young people increased from 1.1 to 1.6 per 10,000, and from 29.5 to 41.1 per 10,000 for First Nations young people.
- Nationally, the average amount of time in detention remained the same at 66 days. In Queensland, the average time in detention increased from 74 days to 104 days.

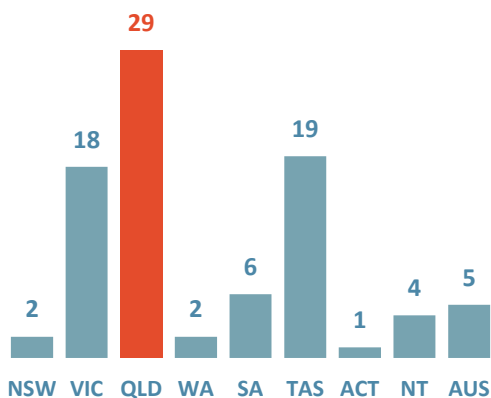
Legal status of young people in detention on an average day in Queensland



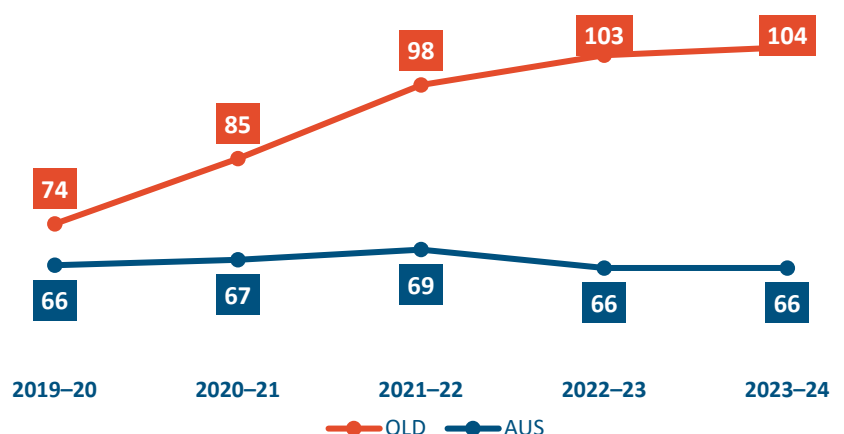
Young people in detention on an average day rate per 10,000



Median length of completed periods of detention in days during 2023-24



Average length of time young people spent in detention in days



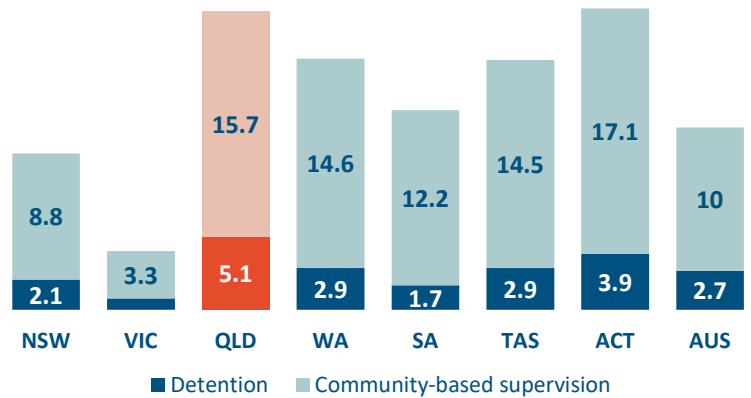
Youth justice supervision: trends and insights

- 36% of young people under supervision were new to supervision in 2023-24. 64% had been supervised in a previous year.
- 39% were from the lowest socio-economic areas, compared to 6% from the highest socio-economic areas.
- First Nations young people first came under supervision at a younger age, with 31% first supervised when aged 10-13, compared to 14% of non-Indigenous young people.

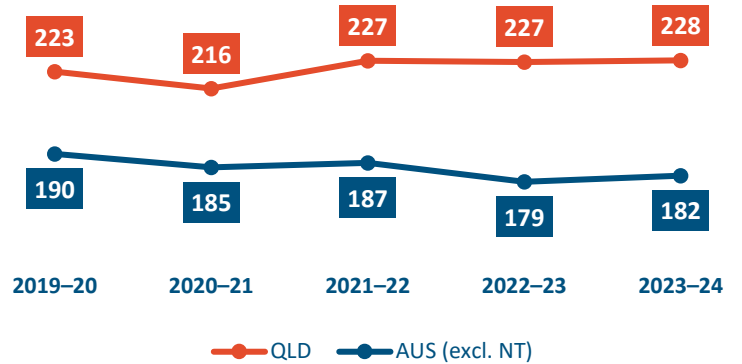
Between 2019–20 and 2023–24:

- Nationally, the rate of 10-17 year olds under supervision decreased by 23% compared to 14% in Queensland.
- Nationally, the community supervision rate decreased from 7.2 to 4.7 per 10,000 for non-Indigenous young people, and from 105 to 88 per 10,000 for First Nations young people.
- Nationally, the average time under supervision decreased from 190 days to 182 days. In Queensland, the average time under supervision increased from 223 days to 228 days.

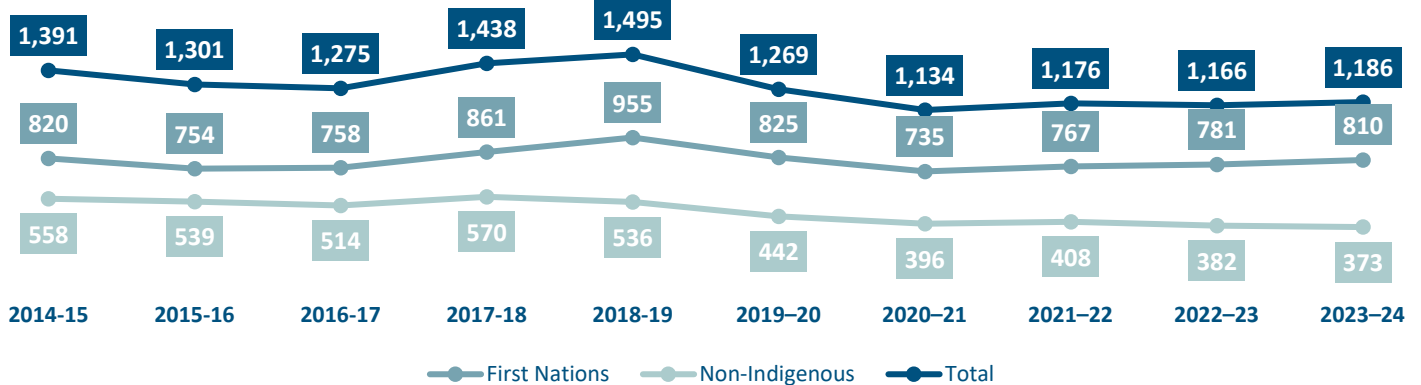
Rate per 10,000 young people aged 10–17 under supervision on an average day in 2023-24



Average length of time in days spent under supervision



Number of young people aged 10–17 under youth justice supervision on an average day in Queensland



National rates of over-representation

First Nations young people were more likely to be:

held in detention

27 times

under community-based supervision

19 times

Young people were more likely to be under youth justice supervision if there were:

living in very remote areas

11 times

living in lowest socio-economic areas

6 times

young males

3 times

Higher preventable early mortality rates identified among youth justice involved young people in Queensland

YOUTH JUSTICE

OVER-REPRESENTATION

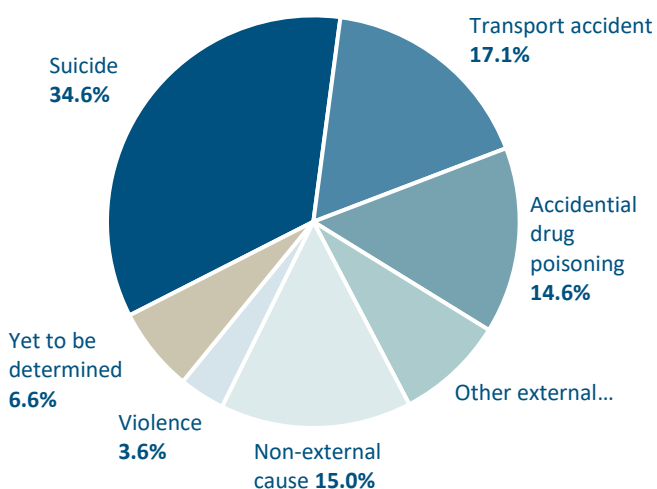
CHILD DEATHS

A recent study published in *The Lancet* used linked data to analyse mortality rates within a population-level sample of young people with youth justice involvement. The sample consisted of 48,670 young people aged 10–18 who were charged with at least one criminal offence as a juvenile in Queensland between July 1 1993 and June 30 2014, followed for a mean of 13.5 years.

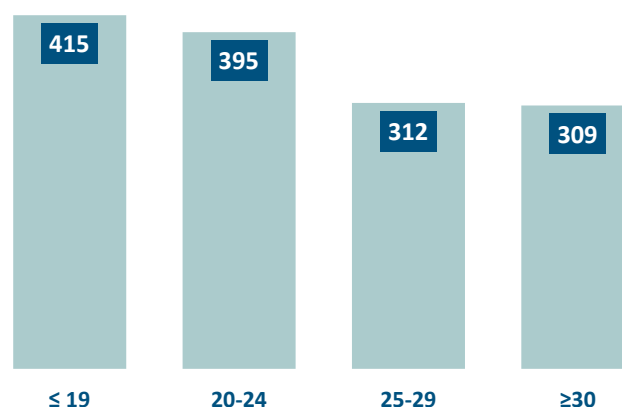
Key findings

- 1,431 young people died during the follow up period, reflecting 2.9% of the total sample, and an overall mortality rate for all causes that was 4.2 times higher than that of the age and sex matched general population.
- Mortality over-representation was highest among young people who had spent time in detention (6.4), followed by those with community-based orders (4.3), and charges only (3.5).
- Mortality over-representation was highest among Indigenous females (7.2) and lowest among non-Indigenous males (3.8).
- 98.4% of deaths occurred in the community.
- Other variables associated with a higher mortality rate included a greater number of youth justice charges, orders, or detention episodes; being incarcerated as an adult; and spending more aggregate time in youth detention or adult prison.
- Most deaths were from preventable causes and among young people under the age of 25.
- Compared to the general population, the most over-represented cause of death was accidental drug poisoning for Indigenous females, non-Indigenous females and non-Indigenous males, and violence for Indigenous males.

Cause of death



Age at death (in years)



Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate that youth justice involvement is associated with higher early mortality rates, particularly for Indigenous young women. It is likely that youth justice involvement is a marker of pre-existing risk. Policy and service responses need to be gender-responsive and culturally appropriate.

Kinner, S. A., Calais-Ferreira, L., Young, J. T., Borschmann, R., Clough, A., Heffernan, E., Harden, S. Spittal, M. J., & Sawyer, S.M. (2025). Rates, causes, and risk factors for death among justice involved young people in Australia: a retrospective, population-based data linkage study. *The Lancet*, 10, e274-284. [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667\(25\)00042-8.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667(25)00042-8.pdf)

Knowledge shifts public attitudes towards raising the age of criminal responsibility in Western Australia

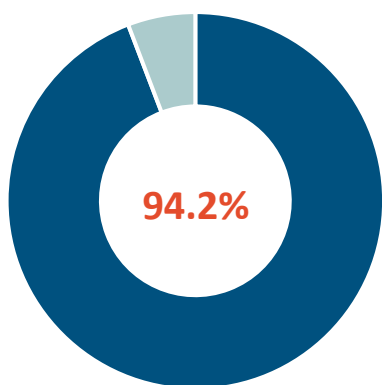
YOUTH JUSTICE

A study recently published in the *International Journal of Human Rights* examined public perceptions and knowledge about the criminal age of responsibility in Western Australia. Findings from interviews with 69 community members identified an increase in support for raising the age when participants were presented with factual information.

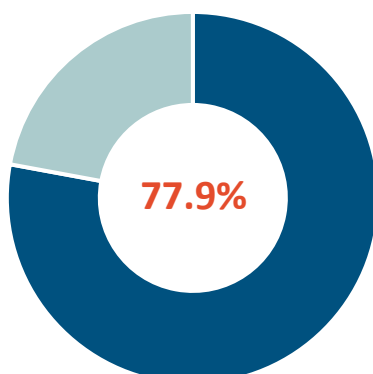
Key findings

- 94.2% of participants did not know the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years old and expressed disbelief when informed of the age at which a child could be arrested, charged, remanded in custody, sentenced and incarcerated. When informed, they felt the age was too low and reflected Australia negatively in the global context.
- 77.9% of participants believed the age should be raised based on an understanding that decision-making skills are still developing during middle childhood and reasoned by comparing the age of criminal responsibility to the age of other social responsibilities such as social media access, sexual consent, voting and driving.
- For the participants who stated the age should remain at 10 years old, the most common theme was that raising the age would lead them to 'fall through the cracks'; that if not held accountable for their actions they may become entrenched in offending.
- Participants were in disbelief about the financial costs of incarcerating children, and believed funding would be better used on rehabilitation and support interventions.
- Participants indicated that the police and court systems had a responsibility to teach young people right from wrong and about the consequences of behaviours, especially when this is not being taught by parents.

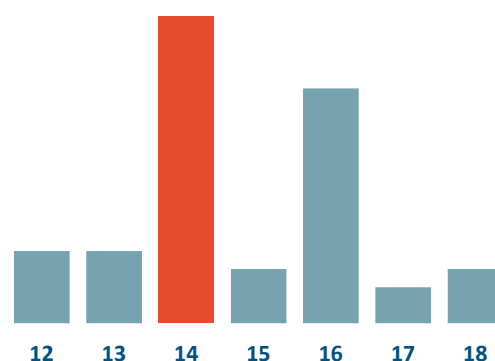
Participants who did not know the minimum age of criminal responsibility is 10 years old



Participants who believed the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be raised



Participants views of what the minimum aged of criminal responsibility should be raised to (n=46)



Conclusion

Limited public knowledge about youth justice issues may delay government reform when politicians align their actions to the views of their constituencies. Members of the public support reforms when they are better informed about the criminal age of responsibility, demonstrating the importance of increasing public awareness.

Rock, S., Gately, N., Moraro, P., & Finney, J.L. (2025). From 'raise the age' to 'raise the awareness': how knowledge affects public opinion of the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Western Australia, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 29(3), pp. 431-451, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2024.2415703>

Development of a growth and empowerment tool, co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth detention

YOUTH JUSTICE

OVER-REPRESENTATION

Recent research published in *The Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* presents an adaptation of a validated survey instrument to measure growth and empowerment. The adapted instrument was co-designed with 103 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experiencing youth detention in Brisbane Youth Detention Centre or West Moreton Youth Detention Centre between 2021 and 2023.

Study background

This study forms part of the Indigenous Mental Health Intervention Project for Young People (IMHIP-Youth), developed to support social and emotional wellbeing and reduce the risks of re-incarceration among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experiencing youth detention in south-east Queensland. The co-design process included leadership from the Cultural Governance Group and ongoing involvement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experiencing detention, their families, carers, Elders and communities.

Survey instrument

The Growth and Empowerment Measure (GEM) was originally developed by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults to measure perspectives of their psychosocial wellbeing and empowerment at individual, family, organisational and structural levels. GEM includes questions about demographics: 'getting to know you', 14 questions about social and emotional wellbeing: 'how I feel about myself'; and 12 questions about empowerment: 'thinking about my everyday life'.

Methods and participants

- 80% of the young people were male, with a median age of 15 years and 9 months.
- Researchers developed a draft adapted GEM survey instrument, then tested it with young people, seeking feedback regarding its relevance, visual appeal, language and the order of questions.
- A new version was developed with 7 adaptations, and some young people provided comparisons between the two versions.

Feedback from young people

- Young people identified that the draft GEM was time consuming and fatiguing to complete.
- No young people could read the draft GEM independently, and identified concerns with phrasing, terminology and the concepts of empowerment and terminology.
- Noise, lockdowns, peer pressure and time pressures associated with youth detention negatively impacted young people's ability to focus and their feelings about completing the survey.
- Young people's suggestions related to formatting, rewording deficit-based questions, text enlargement, brighter colours, removing references to education opportunities not available in detention (ie: TAFE), and language simplification, such as, "I feel like I can look after myself" instead of "I can meet the needs of myself and my family".
- Suggestions for cultural relevance included the addition of a question on cultural identity and design elements reflecting local Country symbols for growth, empowerment and life journeys.

Conclusion

The final version of the adapted GEM survey instrument was assessed as having high internal consistency and reliability, indicating that it can accurately assist clinicians to better understand and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth detention.

This study demonstrates that survey instruments which are not informed by lived experience may fail to reflect the complexities of young people's experiences and needs. Effective survey instruments should be strengths-based, developmentally appropriate and incorporate local cultures and contexts.

Fletcher (Garigal and Walkaloo) R.H., Wittenhagen L., Cormick, A., et al. (2025). Development of a growth and empowerment tool (GEM-Youth) co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, in press. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00048674251324819>

Views among Queensland children and young people in out-of-home care about family and cultural connections

CHILD SAFETY

A study published in *Child Abuse & Neglect* included the views of 62 children and young people in out-of-home care in Queensland aged 4-15, including 20 who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Art-based graphic-elicitation interviews were used to elicit participant's views on family and cultural connections.

Cultural identity

- All 20 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children were placed with non-Indigenous carers.
- 10 mentioned cultural identity, including a few who named practices such as dance, painting, hunting and traditional foods.
- 6 indicated that they informally share culture with siblings through games and stories.
- 3 described participating in formal cultural activities, such as clubs and dance groups.
- 3 mentioned cultural connections with extended kin.
- 1 child in a kinship placement identified their Nation or language group, and another mentioned a geographical region of special significance to her family.
- A few mentioned that their carers made efforts to display cultural artifacts, such as artwork and photos, in the home.

Family relationships and connections

- 35 children mentioned their parents, but younger children and those in foster placements did so less often.
- 58 mentioned siblings.
- 30 children mentioned extended family they did not live with.
- A small number expressed that they could not live with their parents due to their parent's inability to care for them or medical issues. One stated their parents did not want them.
- 57 children mentioned contact with family they did not live with.
- 22 reported contact with parents, including 10 on a regular basis.
- Some described visits with parents as awkward, boring, or upsetting.
- 8 out of 15 who did not live with siblings reported having contact.
- A third of children mentioned parents when describing special memories, and some shared mementos.
- 7 identified parents as the most important people in their lives.
- Many expressed a desire for more family contact.
- Distance and parental incarceration were the most frequently cited barriers to family contact.

Venables, J., Povey, J., Kolesnikova, I., Thompson, K., Boman, M., Richmond, J., Healy, K., Baxter, J., Thwaite, I., & Hussain, A. (2025). Children in out-of-home care's right to family and cultural connection: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australian children's perspectives. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 162(Pt 1), 107009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.107009>

Australian study on public perceptions of child protection

CHILD SAFETY

A study published in *Child Protection and Practice* included the views of 188 undergraduate psychology students in Victoria to explore public perceptions about the role of child protection services. Most respondents understood the core function of child protection to be protecting children from harm, however restorative practices such as collaboration, reunification and family capacity building were less understood, which can undermine public support.

Respondents' identification of child protection roles

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| • Safety and prevention of child harm | 70.5% |
| • Child removals | 17.6% |
| • Promote child well-being | 12.5% |
| • Safety investigations | 9.6% |
| • Risk assessments | 8.0% |
| • Promote children's best interests | 5.9% |
| • Legislative responsibilities | 3.7% |
| • Family reunification | 2.7% |
| • Protect child rights | 2.7% |
| • Educate/collaborate with parents | 1.6% |

Proportion of respondents who correctly identified child protection risk factors

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| • Unplanned pregnancy | 89.9% |
| • Child disability | 77.1% |
| • Parental unemployment | 70.7% |
| • Low parental self-esteem | 68.1% |
| • Low social economic status | 64.4% |
| • Parental separation/divorce | 61.7% |
| • Family conflict or violence | 56.4% |
| • Social isolation | 54.8% |
| • Teenage/young mother | 46.8% |

Politis, S., Sivasubramaniam, D. Gogan, T., & Papalia, N. (2025). Lay understanding and perceptions of child protection: Limited awareness of restorative principles. *Child Protection and Practice*, 4, 100125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chipro.2025.100125>

Aboriginal-led framework for culturally responsive clinical supervision

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

A study recently published in *Australian Social Work* presents an Aboriginal-led exploration of culturally responsive social work supervision practices. Based on a review of relevant literature, the study presents a conceptual framework for supervision structured around “Knowing on Country”, “Being on Country”, and “Doing on Country.”

Knowing on Country

Cultural identity:

connecting an individual to spirituality, cultural identity, Country, community and family to enhance a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Cultural infusion:

integrating cultural and clinical knowledge to support trauma-aware, strengths-based and healing-informed practices.

Being on Country

Community: collaborative relationships and recognition of different ways of learning, knowing, being and doing.

Walking alongside: working with Aboriginal leaders to gain cultural insights, enhance social justice and healing practices.

Relationality: foregrounding Aboriginal principles of respect, responsibility, generosity, obligation and reciprocity.

Third space: understanding the interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives.

Doing on Country

Deep listening: being fully present with genuine respect.

Watching, listening, waiting and then acting: co-creation of knowledge through self-determination and empowerment.

Yarning: circular conversation for two-way learning.

Hybrid yarning: including non-Aboriginal people in yarning without cultural appropriation.

Conclusion

Culturally appropriate social work practice includes clinical supervision that values and respects the cultural identity of Aboriginal workers, their lived experience and expertise. This can influence social work practice by enhancing knowledge about cultural ways of learning.

Sorby, J., McKenzie, C., Regan-Coe, R., Zufferey, C., & Moulding, N. (2025). Supervision on Country: Enhancing Culturally Safe Social Work Supervision Through First Nations Knowledges. *Australian Social Work*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2025.2462304>

Australian study on cultural connections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed with non-Indigenous carers

CHILD SAFETY

A study recently published in *The Australian Journal of Social Issues* included focus groups with 39 out-of-home care workers in Western Australia to explore barriers and facilitators to cultural connections, cultural knowledge and cultural activities for First Nations children in out-of-home care placed with non-First Nations carers.

Key findings

- No consistency in cultural planning provision or information sharing, which leaves agencies without necessary information to support connections.
- Carers may support family and cultural connections, but this is beyond their responsibility.
- Not all carers prioritise children’s cultural needs due to perceived competing priorities, their own desire to connect with children, and a lack of understanding about the importance of culture.
- Removing children from remote and regional areas to metro areas makes connections to Country difficult.
- Supporting sibling connections by placing children with siblings when possible and facilitating visitation is critical.

Conclusion

Governments and out-of-home care agencies are responsible for supporting the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living away from kin, Country and community to promote cultural well-being and disrupt intergenerational cycles of harm. This is best achieved through listening and responding to Elders and community knowledge holders.

Hamilton, S., Jones, L., Penny, M., Pell, C., Maslen, S., Michie, C., Mutch, R., O’Donnell, M., Shepherd, C., & Farrant, B. (2025). Culture, Connection and Care: The Role of Institutional Justice Capital for Enhancing the Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out-Of-Home Care. *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.70011>