

Assessing the quality of transition plans in out-of-home care

Transition planning

Care leavers

Residential care

Housing

Wainwright, H., Savaglio, M., Morris, S., Newton, D., Devery, A., Luke, J., Grage-Moore, S., Gonsalves, S., Halfpenny, N., Nyblom, C., James, C., Mendes, P., & Skouteris, H. (2026). Assessing the quality of transition plans in out-of-home care. *Child & Family Social Work* 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.70224>.

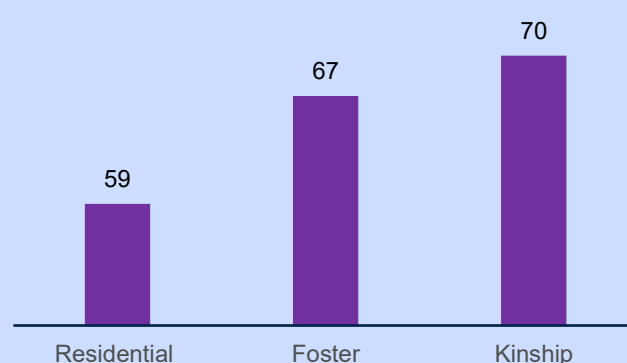
Key takeaway: Written transition plans for young people leaving OOHC in Victoria were mostly of moderate quality with plans for young people living in residential care rated significantly lower in quality than home-based care plans. The study assessed written documentation only, so gaps in plans may reflect recording practices rather than the absence of planning or support.

About the study: Mixed-methods document analysis of 196 de-identified Care and Transition Plans for young people aged 15 to 17 years, drawn from three community service organisations and one ACCO in Victoria.

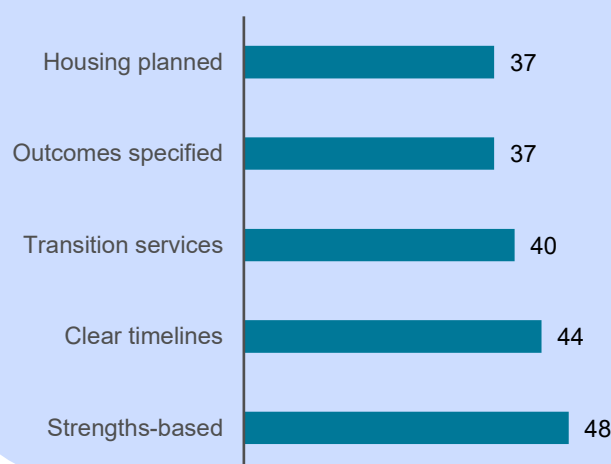
Key findings:

- Across 196 plans, the mean quality score was 62.2 per cent. Most plans (85%) were of moderate quality, 11 per cent were high quality and five per cent were low quality.
- Plans for young people in residential care scored lower on average (59.3%) than kinship (69.7%) and foster care plans (67.3%). Longer time in placement was also associated with lower plan quality.
- Plans developed with the input from the young person were of higher quality (63.9%) than those where input was not sought (58.2%). Involvement was reported in almost three out of four plans (73%).
- Housing was addressed in only 10 per cent of plans, and where addressed, was of low quality (37.3%); engagement with transition-from-care services was 14 per cent and of low quality (40%). Only 2 of 128 residential care plans sufficiently addressed housing. One contributing factor for the absence of housing may be the design of the planning template, which dates from 2012 and has not been updated to reflect new policy and other developments.
- Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people scored lower overall (59.5% compared to 63.2% Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people). The three plans developed by an ACCO scored higher (84.2%) than those from mainstream providers (55.8%).
- The authors recommend redesigning the planning tool, mandated practitioner training, quality monitoring beyond compliance, and stronger cultural support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Mean plan quality by placement type (%)



Lowest-scoring quality items (%)



Summary: This is the first Australian study to assess the quality of written transition plans across placement types. Most plans sat in the moderate band, with quality varying by placement type, the young person's age and involvement, time in placement, and who authored the plan. Health needs were the strongest area, while housing, transition-from-care services, outcome specification and timelines were the weakest. The authors note that many gaps may trace to the design of the 2012 planning template and to system constraints, such as housing sitting outside practitioners' direct control, rather than to individual practice alone. The findings support tool redesign and system-wide quality monitoring rather than compliance checking.