



Guardian
for Children and
Young People

 3/111 Gawler Place, Adelaide 5000
 gcyp@gcyp.sa.gov.au
 www.gcyp.sa.gov.au
 08 8226 8570

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cost of child protection in SA again climbs higher than national average

South Australia continues to be the second highest spender on child protection services per child and spends considerably less on preventative and family support services than any other jurisdiction across the nation.

Data from the Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People's *South Australian Child Protection Expenditure Report 2021* – based on an analysis of the *Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services 2021* – shows that in 2019-20, SA spent 23.8% higher than the national average on child protection services.

Nearly 80% of SA's budget on child protection was spent on care services such as out of home care services and other supported placements, totalling \$458,764,000. Of this amount, 58% per cent was spent on housing just 14.5% of the care population (601 children and young people) in residential care, highlighting the state's continued reliance on the use of residential care.

The Guardian's report also shows SA consistently spent less than the Australian average across protective intervention services, family support services, and intensive family support services, making up only 20% of the state's child protective services budget.

"It is clear to see each year the number of children coming into care grows, and so too does the cost of caring for these young people," Guardian for Children and Young People Penny Wright said.

"We have to turn the tap off to slow down the rate of young people being removed from their home and taken into state care. We need to address the reasons children are being removed in the first place," Ms Wright said.

"Unfortunately due to the personal difficulties that many families face as a result of disadvantage such as domestic violence, mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction, parents are unable to look after their children. This issue is only being intensified by the economic impacts of COVID-19. We need to better invest in intervention services to support families who are at risk of having children removed from them, rather than spend the money once the child has already left."

"The recent decision by the state government to put more money towards providing tailored support to parents who are experiencing these hardships and are at risk of having their children removed is a positive step. I hope that in time we will see noticeable changes as a result of this reform and more children will be able to stay safely at home with their families," Ms Wright said.

Media contact: Jessica Flynn, Senior Policy Officer, P: 8226 8570, E: jessica.flynn@sa.gov.au