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MEDIA RELEASE

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South Australia's spending high as reliance on residential care continues

South Australia's reliance on residential care continues to be the highest across Australia, effectively double the national average.

The Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People's latest analysis of South Australia's child protection expenditure, from the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (ROGS) 2022, found that the impact of the state's reliance on residential care accounted for 59.6% of its care services spending in the 2021 financial year, or \$300 million per year, despite only 15.0% of the care population living in these facilities.

Guardian for Children and Young People, Penny Wright, is calling for South Australia to make a more concerted effort to reduce the number of children and young people living in residential care – by investing in more therapeutic services and support for families to stop children and young people entering care in the first place.

"Each year that passes, the state's reliance on residential care remains alarming high. We know it is costing an enormous amount of money to keep a roof over a young person's head, in what is often a less than ideal place for vulnerable children and young people to live," Ms Wright said.

"In my office's soon to be released final report on our South Australian Dual Involved project, which looks into children and young people caught up in the child protection and youth justice systems, we have found that those living in residential care are at higher risk of being detained in Adelaide's youth detention centre."

"It is far more efficient to invest more in keeping children and young people safe and at home with their families, than to spend increasing amounts every year on inadequate care environments which expose them to the risk of experiencing further trauma than they have already experienced in their young lives."

The South Australian child protection expenditure report provides a summary of child protection data and expenditure on child protection services in South Australia, as detailed in the ROGS 2022. It highlights that –

- On 30 June 2021, there were 4,366 children and young people in out of home care in South Australia. Of those, 654 were living in residential care, which is 15% of the care

population. South Australia continues to have the highest reliance on residential care in Australia; the national average is 7.3%.

- Aboriginal children and young people continue to be grossly overrepresented in out of home care, accounting for 37.5 per cent of the out of home care population on 30 June 2021.
- Real expenditure on care services per placement night in South Australia is 20.3% higher than the national average.
- South Australian real expenditure on care services per child aged 0-17 in the population has increased by 15.4% from \$1,173.4 per child in 2016-17, to \$1,353.7 per child in 2020-21.
- South Australian spending on protective intervention, family support, and intensive family support services continues to be lower than the national average.

The South Australian Dual Involved Project's final report will be released later this week.