

MEDIA RELEASE

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South Australia's Child Protection System: Progress and Challenges Revealed in New Report

The latest Report on Government Services (ROGS) 2025 provides a critical analysis of South Australia's child protection system, highlighting areas of progress while underscoring persistent challenges that require urgent attention.

The Guardian for Children and Young People publishes an annual report monitoring key outcomes for children and young people in state care, based on the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (ROGS) 2025.

This year's analysis indicated that South Australia is showing signs of stabilising the number of children entering care, with the total number of children in care increasing by 0.7% in 2023-24. It also showed increased expenditure in the area of family support and intensive family support services, indicating a stronger focus on early intervention to keep families together.

However, it also showed that deeper structural reforms are needed. Efforts to prioritise family-based placements, enhance placement stability, and address the systemic overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care must be at the forefront of policy reforms.

This year's analysis found that significant concerns remain regarding children's placement stability, with 13.3% of children who have been in care for two or more years and exited care in 2023-24 having experienced more than 10 placements, up from last year's figure of 12.0%.

Guardian, Shona Reid said this figure reflected how tumultuous many years in care can be for a child which impacts their ability to heal from trauma.

"At times, I see a child's care journey interrupted so often by poor placement matching, inconsistent service responses or inability to access desperately needed services that I wonder if we are truly acting in their best interests or are we just adding to the list of people who let them down."

Additionally, ROGS data showed there was a 3.7% increase in the number of children being placed in residential care between 2023 and 2024.

Residential care is an institutional environment based on rotating shifts of paid care workers that should only be used sparingly. While there are some circumstances where it may be in the best interests of individual children and young people, it's largely associated with poor wellbeing outcomes in the long-term.

Despite this, 17.3% of all children in out-of-home care in South Australia are placed in residential care — one of the highest rates in the country.



The proportion of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care also remains disproportionately high, with one in eleven Aboriginal children in South Australia currently in care.

Other areas of concern identified by The Guardian:

- A stark difference in NAPLAN results for children in care compared to their peers, with 21.5% of children in care achieving 'strong' or 'exceeding' numeracy proficiency, compared to 61.8% of all children.
- The total number of children in care grew from 4,882 to 4,915 – a 0.7% rise. While the growth rate has slowed, South Australia remains out of step with the national trend, which saw a decrease in care numbers.
- The growing use of third-party orders to transfer guardianship away from the state raises concerns over reduced oversight and the long-term outcomes for affected children.
- A \$3.2 million decrease in Protective Intervention Service funding to assess, investigate and respond to suspect child abuse and neglect.

Ms Reid said while there are small signs of the stabilisation of children entering care, the data does not reflect a system that is fundamentally improving outcomes for children and young people in the out-of-home care system.

"I truly look forward to the time where we shift away from reactive intervention and meaningfully move towards greater focus on preventative supports and in investing in growing children well when they do enter care.

The government must act now to ensure that children and young people grow up where it is best for them to do so, where they are loved, cherished and become all they can be.

This is something every parent wants for their child, and it should be no different for children who are in out-of-home care. It's their right and they deserve it."

A full copy of The Guardian's [ROGS report](#) and [factsheet](#) can be found on our website.