

# CHILD PROTECTION

FROM THE

## REPORT ON GOVERNMENT SERVICES 2025

Since 2017, the Guardian for Children and Young People has published an annual monitoring report that analyses data from the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services, related to care services and child protection services expenditure.

This series of fact sheets monitors five key outcomes to uphold the rights and best interests of children and young people in care in South Australia - and, more broadly, across the nation.

1

### Reducing the Number of Children and Young People in Care

Children and young people have a right to grow up with their families, wherever this is possible and in their best interests. If they do come into care, this should be for the shortest time possible. In SA we need to get better at supporting families as an alternative to child removal, as well as improving avenues for reunification.

2

### Prioritising Family Environments

It's uncontroversial to say: families are better at growing up children and young people than government departments or institutional environments. SA systems need to prioritise supporting children and young people in care to live in kinship and family-based care environments.

3

### Improving Quality of Care for Children and Young People

The best early intervention and prevention is investing in the lives and quality of care for children and young people in care - to help them grow well, safe and supported. The sectoral focus on investing and improving practice in other child protection areas in SA is highly important. But it should not detract from striving to improve the quality of care services in SA.

4

### Achieving equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have historically - and continue to - experience inequality, discrimination and racism within SA's child protection and care system. Monitoring these areas requires a primary focus on redressing these inequities and combatting racial discrimination.

5

### Increasing Government spending where it matters

One of the key levers for achieving change is adequately resourcing child protection, family support and out-of-home care programs. Whilst expenditure alone does not determine quality of care, adequate funding is essential to promoting the rights and best interests of children and young people in care.

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### Reducing the Number of Children & Young People in Care

#### KEY OBSERVATIONS

Data source: ROGS 2025, Tables 16A.2, 16A.3 & 16A.42

- At 30 June 2024**
- 4,915 children & young people in care in SA
  - This means 13.0 per 1,000 children and young people in SA were in care
  - Increase of 0.7% since 30 June 2023
  - In comparison to the rest of the country:
    - 9.6 in every 1,000 children and young people in Australia were living in care
    - Decrease in care population nationally by -0.4%
    - SA had the second highest per capita rate of children and young people in care

**Out-of-home care:** placements approved by DCP, where there is ongoing case management and financial payment. This includes formal court ordered and voluntary placements

**+**

**Other supported placements:** Includes children on third party parental responsibility orders and children on immigration orders.

**= 'IN CARE'**

**Q:** Was there improvement in reducing the number of children and young people in care in South Australia?

**A:** There was some improvement! We saw less growth than in recent years...but the number of children and young people in care still increased in SA, while it decreased nationally.

SA MUST DO BETTER AT SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE - AND THEIR FAMILIES - TO STAY TOGETHER SAFE AND WELL

#### WHAT DO WE NEED TO SEE IMPROVEMENT?

##### LESS ENTRIES

through better supporting families - NOT ignoring child protection concerns

##### MORE EXITS

particularly through REUNIFICATION



Data source: ROGS 2025, Table 16A.4 and 16A.42

**706 children entered OOH in SA in 2023-24**

That's 1.9 children, per 1,000 children in the population, compared to 778 children admitted in 2022-23 (2.1 per 1,000 children in SA)

Data source: ROGS 2025, Table 16A.2, 16A.4 and 16A.42

**712 children exited OOH in SA in 2023-24**

That's 13.7% of children in an OOH placement in 2023-24 - still the lowest rate in the country compared to 654 children discharged from OOH in SA in 2022-23 (12.6% of all in care)

With fewer entries to and more exits from OOH...why did the overall number in care rise?

Exits from OOH include transferring to 'other supported placements' - including third-party orders.

These 'exits' are statistically counted...but don't reduce the overall number of children in care. This can skew the numbers.

In 2023-24, there was an 11.2% increase in children and young people living in 'other supported placements'

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### Prioritising Family Environments

#### KEY OBSERVATIONS

**In 2023-24**

- The residential care population continues to rise
- At 30 June 2024, 783 children were in residential care - 17.3% of all OOHC placements
- This is an increase of 28 children from 30 June 2023 (3.7%)
- The number of children in residential care rose at 5 x the rate of the care population

Data source: ROGS 2025, Table 16A.21

#### OOHC PLACEMENTS IN SA % of all OOHC Placements

Placement Type	SA	Aust.
Residential Care	17.3%	11.4%
Relative/Kinship Care	51.2%	55.3%
Family-Based Foster Care	30.4%	31.5%
Other	1.1%	1.6%

ROGS 2025: Table 16A.21

#### FOSTER CARE

1,376 children & young people in foster care at 30 June 2024 in SA

That's a 5.2% decrease from 30 June 2023

And consistent with trends around the country

#### RESIDENTIAL CARE

1 in 483 children & young people in South Australia live in residential care

compared to 1 in 1,227 children and young people in Australia

Data source: ROGS 2025: Table 16A.21 and 16A.42

More than 2 x the national rate

#### AREAS WHERE SA IMPROVED

ROGS 2025, Table 16A.21

At 30 June 2024, 2,319 (or 51.2%) of children and young people in OOHC in SA were placed with 'relatives/kin

This was an increase in both number and proportion - from 2,2284 (50.4%) at 30 June 2023

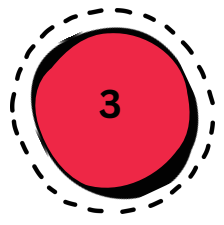
#### RELATIVES/KINSHIP CARE

People who are family or close friends, or are members of a child or young person's community - including in accordance with their culture.

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### Quality of Care

### NOTE TO READER:

ROGS reporting doesn't include many indicators related to quality of care  
Other OGCYP reports look at this in more detail

#### CASE PLANS

At 30 June 2024, 93.3% of children required to have a current documented case plan in SA had one in place  
*ROGS 2025, Table 16A.24*

Higher than the national proportion (88.1%)

Lower than at 30 June 2023 (92.2%)

#### SUBSTANTIATIONS OF ABUSE

In 2023-24

**4.2%** of children in care in SA were subject to a substantiation of abuse\* or neglect  
*ROGS 2025, Table 16A.1 and 16A.14*

\*Abuse includes physical, sexual or emotional abuse

compared to approximately 0.3% of all children and young people in SA

compared to 3.1% in SA 2022-23

**Interpret with caution:**  
Higher substantiations does not necessarily mean more children were abused...there's much more to these figures. But it is concerning that the proportion is so much higher for children in care than other children in SA.

**Q:** Is it good to have a high proportion of current documented case plans?  
**A:** Absolutely! These case plans are so important for children and young people. That being said...the most important thing is the quality of the case plans. This is something that the ROGS data can't tell us. We talk about that in other OGCYP reports.

### AREAS OF CONCERN

#### NATIONAL READING & NUMERACY BENCHMARKS

Proportion of children and young people in South Australia achieving 'Strong' or 'Exceeding' proficiency at Year 5 level in 2023-24  
*ROGS 2024, Table 16A.40*

	LITERACY	NUMERACY
In care	31.8%	21.5%
All children	71.4%	61.8%

compared to 5.4%, nationally

There's a big gap in educational outcomes for children and young people in care and their peers – with more support needed. We will be keeping a close eye on educational outcomes in future reports.

#### PLACEMENT INSTABILITY

**1M 2023-24**  
For children and young people exiting care after 2 or more years in care...  
**13.3%** had experienced more than 10 placements while in care  
*ROGS 2025 Table 16A.16*

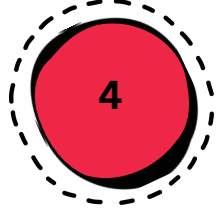
This figure rose by 1.3 percentage points, from 12.0% in 2022-23

*ROGS 2024, Table 16A.15*

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### Equity for Aboriginal Children & Young People

**Q:** Was there improvement in achieving equity for Aboriginal children and young people in South Australia in 2023-24

**A:** Measuring progress and efforts extends far beyond indicators reported in the ROGS 2025. That being said - there were some positive signs in 2023-24, particularly around prioritising family-based care placements. There's a long way to go to see meaningful improvement.

#### OUT-OF-HOME CARE

**At 30 June 2024**  
1,824 Aboriginal children and young people were living in care in SA – 37.1% of the care population in SA.

*ROGS 2025, Table 16A.2, 16A.3 and 16A.42*

This is a rate of 86.8 per 1,000 Aboriginal children in the SA population

This is 10.1 x the rate for non-Aboriginal children - at 8.6 per 1,000 non-Aboriginal children in the population.

SA continues to have the second highest rate in the country following Victoria

#### RESIDENTIAL CARE

**At 30 June 2024**

- 284 Aboriginal children and young people were living in residential care.
- This was 36.3% of the residential care population.
- In comparison to 30 June 2023
- The number of Aboriginal children and young people in residential care decreased by 2.1%
- This was a big difference to the previous year - where that number rose by 9.8%

*Data source: ROGS 2025, Table 16A.21*

#### OTHER SUPPORTED PLACEMENTS

**At 30 June 2024, 80 Aboriginal children and young people were living in 'other supported placements'**

- 20.7% of all children in these placements.

**This has been growing over past years.**

At 30 June 2019, there were 27 Aboriginal children and young people in other supported placements (13.2% of all children in these placements)

**16.3% of Aboriginal children and young people in care in SA were living in residential care**

This was the highest proportion in the country, and significantly higher than the national proportion, at 11.0%

**But - for the first time since 2016-17, the number and proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in residential care fell. This is a positive sign**

#### PLACEMENT WITH RELATIVES/KIN

**55.9%** of Aboriginal children & young people in OOHc were placed with 'relatives/kin'.

**This was a increase from 54.9% in 2022-23**

*ROGS 2025, Table 16A.22*

#### INTERPRETATIVE NOTES

The definition of relatives/kin in the ROGS does not align with family and kinship relationships as defined by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

Data for non-Aboriginal children and young people is not directly comparable – as a broader definition of relatives/kin applies for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people

#### PLACEMENT WITH ABORIGINAL CARERS

	2023-24	2022-23
Aboriginal carers	38.0%	38.1%
Non-Aboriginal carers	45.7%	45.3%

*ROGS 2025, Table 16A.23*

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### 5 Government Expenditure

**Child Protection Services Expenditure** is broken up into four program areas:

- **Protective Intervention Services**
- **Family Support Services**
- **Intensive Family Support Services**
- **Care Services**

#### PROTECTIVE INTERVENTION SERVICES (PIS)

The assessment, investigation and response to reports of suspected child abuse or neglect, including referrals and intervention responses.

**In 2023-24**

Real expenditure on PIS in SA was \$78.2 million - a decrease of \$3.2 million compared to 2022-23.

This is a concerning decrease, noting that South Australia has the lowest expenditure on PIS per child in the population.

South Australia was 39.8% lower than the national expenditure per child in the population.

#### CARE SERVICES

the provision of OOHC and other supported placement services.

\$744.0 million real expenditure on care services, an increase of \$49.9 million from 2022-23.

Care services expenditure accounted for 79.7% of all child protection expenditure in 2023-24.

#### FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES (FSS)

The identification and assessment of family support needs, with initial non-intensive service delivery or referral.

This was an increase of \$34.3 million (44.2%) since 2022-23.

**In 2023-24**

- Combined FSS and IFSS real expenditure was \$111.9 million
- Expenditure on FSS and IFSS amounted to \$295.44 per child in the population

This was 7.4% higher than the national expenditure

Data source: ROGS 2025, Table 16A.8

#### INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES (IFSS)

Intensive support services, focused on family preservation and reunification.

The annual cost of residential care in SA in 2023-24, per child in care at 30 June 2024, was 8.5 times the cost of non-residential care: \$608,542 compared to \$71,436.

Annual expenditure per child (in care at 30 June) increased for both residential and family-based care - by 3.4% and 8.0%, respectively.

This was below the average increase for reporting jurisdictions for residential care (4.0%), and below the average for family-based care (11.9%)

Data source: ROGS 2025, Table 16A.8 and 16A.36 and 16A.37

**Over the past five years, cost per placement night has increase by 13.9% in SA, compared to 50.7% nationally**

SA continues to have a significantly lower expenditure per child in residential care, compared to other reporting jurisdictions.

Vic, WA and Tas averaged \$1.0 million per child whilst SA's expenditure was \$0.6 million - or \$0.4 million lower per child.

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### End Notes

## About the Guardian for Children & Young People

The Guardian is an independent statutory officer, appointed to promote and advocate for the rights and best interests of children and young people in care. This includes advocacy on an individual and systemic basis, as well as monitoring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in care.

The Guardian is also appointed as Child and Young Person's Visitor, Training Centre Visitor and Youth Treatment Orders Visitor.

More information about each of these roles is available on the Guardian's website at [www.gcyp.sa.gov.au](http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au).

## Interpreting ROGS 2025 Data

### COMPANION REPORT

These fact sheets are accompanied by a more detailed report, which provides further contextual information and explanations of the data.

### DATA ACCURACY & COMPATIBILITY

The Productivity Commission urges caution when interpreting data published in the ROGS 2025, due to variance in the completeness, direct comparability and quality of reported data.

Generally, data is comparable within a particular jurisdiction over time, subject to caveats in the relevant data table. Standardised counting rules set out in the National Child Protection Minimum Data Set Data Collection Manual aim to provide consistency across jurisdictions, to the greatest extent possible. However, data comparability across jurisdictions may be impacted by differences in legislative, policy and practice frameworks. Cross-jurisdictional comparative data should be interpreted with due caution, and with reference to the detailed footnotes in the applicable ROGS 2025 tables.

Data in the ROGS 2025 is the most accurate available at the time of data collection, and historical data may have been updated since previous Productivity Commission reports. While the OGCYP has been cautious to ensure that all data in this report is accurate at the time of publication, we acknowledge that there may be unintentional errors or discrepancies. Readers should refer to the ROGS 2025 directly as the most authoritative source of data for the relevant child protection program indicators detailed in this report.

Please note that some data may not add up due to decimal rounding.

### FINANCIAL DATA

Time series financial data in the ROGS 2025 are adjusted to 2023-24 dollars.