

Child protection and family services

Additional service delivery data 2021–22

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Contents

Care Services	1
Placements.....	1
Care Services client incident investigations	2
Suitability Panel	3
Child Protection	3
Child Protection demand.....	4
Supervision	5
Incident reporting	5
Incident categories.....	5
Incident responses.....	5
Client death.....	6
Abuse.....	6
Behaviour.....	6
Other incident types.....	6

Care Services

Placements

When children are unable to live safely at home the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) makes an application to the Children’s Court for the child to be placed in alternative care arrangements.

For children who cannot safely reside with their parents, kinship care is sought to enable the child to remain with extended family or community networks. If a kinship placement cannot be found, foster carers provide a critical role in providing safe and nurturing home-based care for children and young people.

In both kinship and foster care, the carer receives a care allowance and other supports to help meet the needs of a child in their care.

Residential care is used when placement in home-based care is not possible or it is in the child’s best interest regarding their individual circumstances.

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Permanent care is a legal arrangement in which the child lives permanently with a family approved as suitable to assume parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others. Permanent care provides stability for children who are unable to live safely with their birth parents.

The department contracts a variety of community service organisations to recruit and support volunteer foster carers and operate residential care services. Community service organisations also help to provide permanent care services and kinship care support services.

In 2021-22 there were:

- 11,828 children placed in at least one out-of-home care placement during the year (excluding permanent care placements).
- 3,434 admissions to and 3,313 exits from out-of-home care (excluding permanent care placements).
- 9,618 children and young people in out-of-home care (daily average) excluding permanent care.

Table 1 a: Daily average number of children 0–17 years in out-of-home care placements by placement type, by quarter 2021-22 (excluding permanent care)

Quarter	Foster	Kinship	Residential	Total
September 2021	1,636	7,546	468	9,654
December 2021	1,623	7,515	474	9,614
March 2022	1,562	7,442	482	9,490
June 2022	1,573	7,421	489	9,484
State average ¹	1,606	7,526	483	9,618

¹ Columns and the state average do not sum due to a small number of other placement types included in the total.

Table 1 b: Daily average number of children 0-17 years in out-of-home care in permanent care orders by quarter 2021-22

Quarter	Permanent care
September 2021	3,487
December 2021	3,518
March 2022	3,534
June 2022	3,551
State average	3,506

Table 2: Children less than 12 years of age in residential care

	Percentage
The percentage of children in out-of-home care, who are less than 12 years of age and placed in residential care, as at 30 June 2022	0.95%

Note: Children aged less than 12 years of age in residential care may be in specialised arrangements to accommodate sibling groups or to care for children with high and complex needs.

Care Services client incident investigations

The department requires that the safety and best interests of the child are always paramount, and that children and young people in Care Services reside in safe, stable and high-quality placements.

Under the Client Incident Management System (CIMS), organisations are responsible for reporting incidents and investigating incidents when the incident is an allegation of abuse or neglect of a client, and a staff member or carer is identified as the subject of allegation. All reports are treated seriously, and matters reported to police. The purpose of a CIMS investigation is to determine on the balance of probability whether abuse or neglect has occurred.

Ensuring the safety of children may involve removing the child from placement, the removal of the subject of allegation or, where the subject of allegation does not live in the placement, planning for the child to have no further contact with them.

Table 3: Client incident investigations 2021-22

	Number
Number of completed CIMS investigations	615
Number of completed CIMS investigations with an outcome of abuse substantiated	311

The increase from 2020-21 is due to a large number of investigations initiated in the previous reporting period being endorsed in 2021-22. Completed investigations include allegations of abuse or neglect reported to the department in previous reporting periods but were not completed/endorsed until the current reporting period. Multiple clients can be subject to a single CIMS investigation, each with an outcome of "substantiated abuse" or "not substantiated" being reported. CIMS data is not comparable with previously reported Quality of Care data.

Suitability Panel

The Suitability Panel determines whether a carer who is found to have sexually or physically abused a child in his/her care should be disqualified from being recorded in the register of out-of-home carers. The Suitability Panel may also determine whether a carer, who has been disqualified, should have that disqualification removed.

The Suitability Panel held seven hearings (22 referrals) during 2021-22. Sixteen matters were open at the end of the financial year. Of the seven completed hearings, in three matters the allegations of misconduct were found proven, and two of those carers were disqualified.

Child Protection

Services delivered by the department and funded community service organisations focus on the health, safety, development and wellbeing of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and families in Victoria. Child Protection and Family Services include child protection, care services, transition from care services and family services.

Child protection practitioners (CPP) undertake assessment, planning and interventions for children assessed as being at risk of harm in parental care.

In some cases, children subject to protection orders may be contracted to an agency. Child Protection remains responsible for case planning and other statutory functions. All children involved with Child Protection are actively monitored to ensure allocation of the most urgent cases where children are at highest risk.

Table 4 shows the average percentage of clients awaiting allocation each quarter in 2021-22.

Table 4: Average rates³ of clients awaiting allocation 2021-22, by division and state, per cent

Period	North	South	East	West	State
September 2021	12.2	11.0	9.4	13.0	11.6
December 2021	12.2	13.4	10.5	12.3	12.3
March 2022	13.8	10.5	11.1	15.2	13.8
June 2022	18.0	12.6	9.9	14.9	14.0
2021-22 ⁴	14.0	13.0	10.0	14.0	13.0

³ Data represents the average number of unallocated clients for end of month data extract (point in time snap shots) per quarter. The count excludes cases in intake phase and cases awaiting allocation for less than four days. Division and State total includes regional services. The total is a summary of the reported quarters.

⁴ Average over the financial year

Child Protection demand

Child protection receives, assesses, and investigates reports where children may be at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect within their family, and ensures that appropriate services are provided to protect children from harm.

Reports to child protection can be made about a child's wellbeing or safety. Reports can also be made about concern for the wellbeing and safety of unborn children.

Child protection practitioners meet with the child, their carers and contact significant others and professionals in contact with the child to formulate their assessment.

In 2021-22, there were 118,096 child protection reports received.

The number of reports received in 2021-22 was 3 per cent lower than the number in the previous year, while investigations increased by 7 per cent. Substantiations of abuse following investigation showed a 5 per cent decrease from the previous year. Of the 16,066 substantiated cases, 2,653 (16 per cent) involved children who had been part of a previously substantiated case that had been closed in the previous 12 months. The number of reports received on unborn children in 2021-22 was 11 per cent lower than the previous year.

Table 5: Child protection demand⁵

Child protection demand (quarterly data)	September 2021	December 2021	March 2022	June 2022	Total 2021-22
Reports on unborn children	603	544	524	505	2,176
Reports on children	29,796	30,108	28,532	29,620	118,096
Investigations	8,359	9,140	8,685	9,303	35,518
Substantiations	4,387	3,763	4,108	4,179	16,066
Re-substantiations within 12 months					2,653

⁵ The end of quarter result is a point-in-time result, excluding data entry lag. The financial year result captures the data entry lag for the first three quarters and may not reflect the sum of the four quarters.

Supervision

The department is committed to providing a safe work environment and supporting its staff. Supervision is a key mechanism for providing guidance, support and coaching for child protection practitioners.

Table 6: Child protection practitioners classified as CPP3/4 receiving regular supervision

Child protection	Percentage
Supervision provided in line with department policy 2021-22	54%

Note: This result is based on the requirement for two hours of supervision per fortnight for CPP3 staff and one hour for CPP4 staff and reflects an average over the financial year. Data reported prior to 2019-20 is not comparable due to system and reporting upgrades.

Incident reporting

Incident reporting data is a snapshot in time of impacts and allegations made by clients of the department and includes disclosures of historic abuse. Incidents are recorded and remain as incidents regardless of whether further information becomes available to substantiate or disprove an event.

The Client Incident Management System (CIMS) has the aim of ensuring and supporting consistency of understanding in managing and responding to client incidents, as well as improving the standard of responses to incidents. Incidents reported in previous periods before CIMS was operationalised are not directly comparable.

The incident reporting process enables service providers and department staff to take corrective action to protect the wellbeing and safety of clients and staff where necessary. A report to the Police occurs where a client is a victim of a crime and an allegation of physical or sexual abuse is made. The department also undertakes processes to better understand the underlying causes of incidents and prevent their recurrence.

Incident categories

Major Impact (CIMS) incidents are the most serious incidents. Service providers are required to solely focus on the impact (level of harm) to the client rather than the incident itself, including the extent to which a client has experienced physical, emotional and/or psychological harm and the potential risk of further harm.

Incident responses

Where there is an allegation, it is met with a strong response that includes medical attention (should this be required); a report to police if it involves an allegation of physical or sexual abuse or a client is potentially a victim of a crime; and counselling and support being offered to all parties. Each Major Impact incident is subject to either an investigation or a review led by the service provider. This requirement provides a better understanding of how and why incidents occur; how they can be prevented; and how the department and service providers can respond to, and learn from, these incidents. All Major Impact incident reports involving a child or young person in Care Services are provided to the Commission for Children and Young People.

Table 7: Child Protection and Family Services Major Impact incidents (CIMS) 2021-22

CIMS – Major Impact incidents ⁶	2021-22
Client death	11
Abuse	1,646
Behaviour	769
Other incident types	1,362

⁶ Major impact incidents data includes both department-funded organisations and department delivered incident data

Client death

All deaths of children in unexpected or unanticipated circumstances, including suicides, must be reported as major impact incidents. Children who were known to child protection in the 12 months preceding their death are subject to child death inquiries by the Commission for Children and Young People. The department notified the Commission of 37 deaths in 2021-22 that were in scope for a child death inquiry. The child death inquiries are separately reported.

Abuse

Abuse incidents include allegations of physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, and financial abuse. Professional judgement is used with respect to the nature of all abuse to determine the appropriate level of categorisation of each incident.

Allegations of abuse are treated seriously. Where clients are victims, they are supported by family support services, child protection, out-of-home care, and specialist services, including access to specialist victim support services and medical assistance. The Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) is also contacted in cases of alleged sexual abuse unless the client does not want contact with this service. Where a crime may have occurred, Victoria Police are contacted.

Behaviour

While clients can display a range of dangerous and disruptive behaviours placing both themselves and others at risk, behaviours are generally well managed with a range of services being provided to support clients.

Other incident types

Other incidents include matters such as absent client, poor quality of care, injury, and self-harm/attempted suicide.

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