

Child protection and family services

Additional service delivery data 2022–23

OFFICIAL

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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.

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.

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 and kinship care support services.

In 2022-23 there were:

- 12,427 children placed in at least one out-of-home care placement during the year (excluding permanent care placements).
- 3,494 admissions to and 3,676 exits from out-of-home care (including permanent care placements).
- 9,366 children and young people in out-of-home care (daily average) excluding permanent care orders.

Table 1 a: Daily average number of children 0–17 years in out-of-home care placements by placement type, by quarter 2022-23 (excluding permanent care orders)

Quarter	Foster	Kinship	Residential	Total Daily Average number in care ²
September 2022	1,542	7,338	502	9,382
December 2022	1,522	7,326	500	9,348
March 2023	1,487	7,282	493	9,262
June 2023	1,457	7,276	488	9,221
Full year average ¹	1,512	7,354	497	9,366

¹ The sum of quarterly averages for each placement type does not align with the full-year average, primarily due to slight variations in the number of days within each quarter.

² The three placement types for each quarter do not sum to the daily average number in care. The discrepancy arises from the inclusion of a small number of placements categorised as "other" which contributes to the overall total.

Table 1 b: Daily average number of children on permanent care orders by quarter 2022-23

Quarter	Permanent care
September 2022	3,569
December 2022	3,577
March 2023	3,574
June 2023	3,595
Full year average ¹	3,557

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

	Percentage
The percentage of children less than 12 years of age placed in residential care, relative to total children in care as at 30 June 2023	0.59%

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 are cared for in a safe, stable and high-quality setting.

Under the Client Incident Management System (CIMS), organisations must report and investigate any incidents where a child in their care is alleged to have been abused or neglected, and the staff member or carer is identified as the subject of the 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 2022-23

	Number
Number of completed CIMS investigations	676
Number of completed CIMS investigations with an outcome of abuse or neglect substantiated	315

The increase from 2021-22 is a result of a large number of investigations initiated in the previous reporting period being endorsed in 2022-23. Completed investigations include allegations of abuse or neglect reported to the department in 2021-22 but were not completed/endorsed until 2022-23. Multiple clients can be subject to a single CIMS investigation, each with an outcome of "substantiated abuse" or "not substantiated" being reported.

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 twelve hearings (12 referrals) during 2022-23. Eighteen matters were open at the end of the financial year. Of the twelve completed hearings, allegations of misconduct were proven in nine matters, and three of those carers were disqualified.

Child protection

Child protection is part of a broader children and families service system that also includes family services, care services, and transition from care services. Together, these 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 is responsible for receiving, assessing, and investigating reports where children may be at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect within their family, and for ensuring that appropriate services are provided to protect children from harm.

Child protection practitioners (CPP) undertake assessment, planning, and interventions for children assessed as being at risk of harm in parental care. Child protection practitioners meet with the child, their carers, significant others and professionals in contact with the child to formulate their assessment.

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 the allocation of the most urgent cases where children are at the highest risk.

Table 4: Average rates³ of clients awaiting allocation 2022-23, by division and state

Shows the average percentage of clients awaiting allocation each quarter in 2022-23.

Period	North	South	East	West	State
September 2022	14.3	13.2	10.0	15.8	13.8
December 2022	10.4	15.4	12.3	14.4	13.5
March 2023	12.9	14.9	14.8	12.1	13.5
June 2023	13.8	17.5	19.1	15.0	16.1
2022-23 ⁴	12.8	15.2	14.0	14.3	14.2

³ Data represents the average number of unallocated clients for end of month snapshot per quarter. The count excludes cases in intake phase and cases awaiting allocation for less than four days. Division and State totals include regional services.

⁴ Average over the financial year

Child protection demand

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.

In 2022-23, there were 128,705 child protection reports received.

The number of reports received in 2022-23 was 9 per cent higher than the number in the previous year, while investigations increased by 11 per cent. Substantiations of abuse following an investigation showed a 4 per

cent increase from the previous year. Of the 16,778 substantiated cases, 2,691 (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 2022-23 (2,175) was 1.2 per cent lower than the number received the previous year (2,201).

Table 5: Child protection demand ⁵

Child protection demand (quarterly data)	September 2022	December 2022	March 2023	June 2023	Total 2022-23
Reports on unborn children	539	507	579	527	2,175
Reports on children	32,144	32,073	32,533	31,679	128,705
Investigations	9,859	9,661	9,999	9,875	39,404
Substantiations	4,440	4,293	4,121	4,300	16,778
Re-substantiations within 12 months	678	666	676	698	2,691

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. Formal one-on-one supervision is recorded by the child protection practitioner or team manager in an electronic system, which generates reports to monitor compliance about the frequency and duration. Child protection practitioners also receive other forms of supervision not recorded within the system. This may include unplanned supervision in response to events, on site supervision, coaching and mentoring during child protection visits and group supervision.

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

Child protection	Percentage
Supervision provided in line with department policy 2022-23	50%

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 reflects impacts and allegations made by clients 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) is aimed at 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 implemented 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. A report to Victoria 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 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 Victoria 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) 2022-23

CIMS – Major Impact incidents ⁶	2022-23
Client death	9
Abuse	1,225
Behaviour	432
Other incident types	870

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 36 deaths in 2022-23 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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