CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND TRENDS
AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT 2012

A/Professor Elizabeth Fernandez - e.fernandez@unsw.edu.au
School of Social Sciences - The University of New South Wales
Sydney - Australia
Australia: A young state/an old country

- Australian Indigenous population oldest people on earth (70,000 years)
- White settlement is very recent 1788- British convicts became free settlers
- Long history of migration – largest numbers since World War II - migrants/refugees - history of ethnic and cultural diversity
- Multicultural society with strong reliance on migration
- 45% born overseas
The Population

- Approximately 21 million
- Land mass of 7.5 million km – sixth largest in world
- One of the most urbanised countries in the world
- Most live in the south east corner of Australia
- Sydney/Melbourne – 1/3 population
- 60% live in coastal cities
- Implications for provision of services
Federal / Commonwealth

- 3 Tiers of Government - Commonwealth, States, Local Government

- Health Ageing Disability
  e.g. *private health insurance agreements and rebates for private insurance, monitoring standards for services to aged people, nursing homes*

- Human Services
  e.g. *Centrelink (income support, child support, rehabilitation)*

- Veterans Affairs
  e.g. *pensions, health care*

- Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
  e.g. *family relationship services, mediation centres, parenting education, early intervention services, domestic violence programs, play groups, financial assistance e.g. baby bonus*

- Education, Employment and Workplace relations

- Immigration and Citizenship

- Defence
State Government and Local Government

- Community Services – Child protection, Early Intervention, Out of Home Care
- Health – Hospitals, Community Health
- Housing – Public Housing
- Juvenile Justice
- Corrective Services
- Aboriginal Affairs
- Legal Aid Commission
- Community Services – Support to local organisations, social planning
- Community development – Grassroots workers, aged care, youth workers
Non Government Sector/ Not for Profit

• Religious based organisations
e.g. Anglicare, CentreCare, Salvation Army, Jewish Welfare….

• Secular Organisations
e.g. Barnardos, Burnside, Benevolent Society, Red Cross, Australian Council of Social Services….

• Services contracted out to non government sector

• Out of home care services to be transferred to NGOs in New South Wales
Issues in Service Provision

- Complexity of jurisdictions
- Overlap and lack of coordination
- Reliance on volunteers
- Distance – rural vs city populations
- Indigenous people and access to services
Indigenous Population

ABS Measures of Australia’s Progress, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2006 Census
Indigenous Population

- 2.5% of the overall population (ABS, Population 2006)
- Social Disadvantage - Life expectancy of 60 years compared to overall population (80 years)
- 37% of those over 15 have a disability
- Unemployment 3.2 times more than other Australians
- Half as likely to complete school
- Suicide rates higher especially for 25-34 years
- Homicides for Indigenous people 6 times higher
- 11 times more likely to be imprisoned
- ‘Sorry’ apology in Parliament 13/2/08 by Prime Minister
Australian Poverty

- 16% of households are jobless
- 16% of children live in those households
- Australia’s top 10% of income earners earn 40% of Australia’s overall income
- 12% of families are single parent families, mainly female headed
- Rapid increase in people living alone especially older women
Australia’s Welfare State

• Significant expansion of the welfare state in the 40s

• 1970s raft of universal programs –
  free health care, free tertiary education, sole parent benefit,
  rights based unemployment benefits, universal age pension

• Largely a ‘residual’ welfare state based on targeted direction of means-tested payments to the poor and disadvantaged (Frankel, 2001:76)

• Always had both social care (humanitarian) and social control (oppressive) (Mendel, 2008:2)
Shifts in Welfare in Australia

• National health care system ‘Medicare’ – continues but often under threat
• Means tested old age pension
• Social Security moved from ‘rights based’ to ‘mutual obligation’ philosophy - work for the dole (Mendel, 2008:57)
• Growth of the 2 tier health system – (public and private)
• Introduction of full fees for tertiary education
• Privatisation of service e.g. social security/Centrelink, Rehabilitation
• Implications for Social Workers – high demand, tougher environment
Major Social Issues in Australia

Ageing Population

• Significantly older overall population 15% over 65 – 5% over 85
• Increased life expectancy for males and females (twice as many women in this group)
• Majority cared for at home – trend towards maintaining independence 7% in nursing homes
• Increasing number of people with Dementia
• Increased pressure on hospital and nursing home systems
• Push towards privatisation of health insurance (42% - 30% increase over 5 years)
• Retirement income - move towards self insurance retirement income model
• Government promoting delayed retirement.
Refugees

• High refugee intake: 213,409 in 2010-2011

• Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, China, Iran, Bhutan, Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Pakistan, Burma

• Trends 2010-2011 in granting of visas – predominately Iraq, Burma, Afghanistan, Bhutan

• Actions taken by government to disable them from seeking Australian protection seen as harsh

• Condemned by UN for detention of children
Refugees

- Government has released women and children into the community with Temporary Visa Protection
- Some initiatives targeting women at risk
- Currently government is winding back its policy on indefinite mandatory detention for those who arrive by boat
- Impact of detention a serious Social Work issue (torture, trauma, war trauma, cultural alienation, extended detention)
- Australia – Malaysia deal to swap asylum seekers seen as a poor precedent for refugee protection
Domestic Violence

• Violence against women recognised as a significant issue since 70s

• 408,000 victims of DV in 2003-2004, 86% women

• 98% perpetrators were men – culture of male violence against women continues

• 250,000 children living with victims

• Significant amount of fatalities (women and children)

• Interface of domestic violence and child protection
Domestic Violence Responses

- Federal government support to establish refuges (320 refuges)
- Most services provided by community agencies and NGOs
  Women volunteers
- Includes shelters, information resources, referrals, and outreach services
- “Partnership against violence” campaigns with focus on families, communities and perpetrators
- Women’s networks responsible for making it a public issue
At June 2010, the total number of children under 15 years of age was 4.23 million an increase of 208,100 (5.2%) from 2005, however the proportion of the total population in this age group declined from 19.7% to 18.9%. A decline was recorded across all states and territories. ABS (2010).
Critical Events in the Evolution of Child Protection Services

- Late 1800 & early 1900’s Child rescue movement
- 1940’s Start of professionalization of child welfare
- 1962 “Battered child syndrome” discovered
- 1970’s Legislation to protect children in all Australian jurisdictions
- 1970’s First mandatory reporting requirements
- 1980’s Sexual abuse recognized on world stage
- 1990’s Neglect re-discovered
- 1990’s Emotional abuse starting to be recognized
- 1990’s all state criminal jurisdictions introduced legislation on pornography on the Internet
- Penalty of 10 years for possession and 15 years for online grooming
- National strategy to counter online child sexual abuse
- 2000’s Witnessing family violence
How Child Protection Works
Legal Framework (NSW)

- There is a suite of legislation that governs the child protection authority in NSW
  - Children and Young Persons (Care & Protection) Act 1998
  - Children and Young Persons (Care & Protection) Regs 2000
  - Children’s Court Act
  - Administrative Decisions Act
  - Privacy Act
  - Crimes Act
  - Family Law Act
  - NSW Ombudsman’s Act
  - Guardianship Act
  - Child Protection (Offenders Registration)
- The Director General cooperates with the Family Court and the Federal Magistrates Court in relation to child protection matters
Child Protection: The National Context

- State government have statutory responsibility – National policy approach since 1980s
- Key issues – reporting, responses, data management, out of home care services
- 266,745 reports (2005-06) nationally – more than double the number received 5 years ago (115,471)
- Some decreases in notifications since 2009
Over 160,000 children were the subject of a notification about suspected abuse or neglect (just over 3%, or approximately 1 in 31 children).

Notifications are investigated by the state and territory departments responsible for child protection. Most notifications (83%) were not substantiated, however 17% cases were (meaning that sufficient evidence has been found that the child has been, is being or is likely to be abused and/or neglected).
Child Protection substantiations 2010-2011

• In 2010–11 there were about 31,500 children in substantiated abuse or neglect cases. This was around 1 in 165 children aged 0–17 years.

• Emotional abuse was most the common substantiated abuse type, followed by neglect and physical abuse. Sexual abuse was more common among girls; other types of abuse were slightly more common among boys.
# Notifications, investigations and substantiations statistics, 2010–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Rate per 1,000 children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notifications (cases)</td>
<td>237,273</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigations (cases)</td>
<td>127,759</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantiations (cases)</td>
<td>40,466</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children subject to notifications</td>
<td>163,767</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children subject to substantiations</td>
<td>31,527</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

. . Not applicable

Notifications, investigations and substantiations data are for children aged 0-17 and include, where applicable, unborn children

*Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2011*
In line with the decrease in notifications in 2010-11, the total number of substantiations resulting from finalised investigations fell 12% from the previous year, from 46,187 to 40,466.
# Notifications, investigations and substantiations by age, 2010–11

## Table 2.3: Children aged 0–17 in substantiations of notifications received 2010–11, by age, states and territories (number per 1,000 children)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>NSW(^{(a)})</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>WA(^{(b)})</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–17</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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<td>0–17</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{(a)}\) Following the New South Wales Keep Them Safe reforms, the 2010–11 data reflect the first full year of reporting under legislative changes to the New South Wales Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, proclaimed on 24 January 2010. This includes raising the reporting threshold from 'risk of harm' to the new 'risk of significant harm'.

\(^{(b)}\) Western Australia is currently unable to report a child's characteristics based on their first substantiation. As a result a small number of children may be double-counted in this table where they have more than one substantiation and the notifications had differing characteristics such as age or abuse type.

**Notes:**

1. Refer to Table A1.6 for numbers for this table and to Table A1.36 for the population data.
2. Unborn children are excluded in rate calculations for the 'less than 1' and '0–17' categories and included in the 'All children' rates.
3. 'All children' includes children of unknown age.

**Source:** AIHW Child Protection Collections 2011.

Overall just over half (52%) of the children subject to a substantiation were girls (16,224 compared with 15,057 boys). This was consistent in all jurisdictions except for the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory where slightly more boys than girls were the subject of substantiations (Figure 2.6).
Notifications, investigations and substantiations statistics by state, territory and sex, 2010–11

Source: Table A1.5.

Figure 2.6: Children in substantiations of notifications received during 2010–11, by state and territory and sex
Types of abuse and neglect by sex, 2010–11

Note: Only the abuse type for the first substantiation in the year that is most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term is reported.

Source: Table A1.5.

Figure 2.7: Children in substantiations of notifications received during 2010–11, by type of abuse or neglect and sex
Types of abuse and neglect – substantiated cases, 2010–11

- Emotional abuse: 86%
- Neglect: 27%
- Sexual abuse: 14%

52% of substantiations female (16,624 compared to 15,057 boys)

Significant differences in proportion of Aboriginal children substantiated for neglect and emotional abuse in different States
Types of abuse and neglect, 2010–11

Consistent with the patterns in substantiated cases (see Section 2.2) nationally, emotional abuse was the most common substantiation type for children (36%)—ranging from 19% in Western Australia to 51% in Victoria. This was followed by neglect (27%)—ranging from 7% in Victoria to 50% in the Northern Territory (Figure 2.5). As with the proportions of substantiated cases, children were least likely to be substantiated for sexual abuse nationally (14%) and in most jurisdictions—ranging from 5% in the Northern Territory to 23% in New South Wales.

![Bar chart showing the proportion of abuse and neglect cases by state and type](chart.png)

**Notes:**
1. Only the abuse type for the first substantiation in the year that is most likely to place the child at risk or be most severe in the short term is reported.

2. In Tasmania, the abuse type for some substantiations was recorded as ‘other’ or ‘not stated’ and could not be mapped to physical, sexual, emotional or neglect. These substantiations are included in the total, as such; percentages for Tasmania and Australia do not add to 100.

**Source:** Table A1.5.

**Figure 2.5:** Children in substantiations of notifications received during 2010–11, by type of abuse or neglect, states and territories
Notifications, investigations and substantiations statistics, 2010–11

Of the 237,273 notifications, 54% (127,759) were further investigated while the remaining 46% (109,514) were dealt with by other means, such as being referred to a support service. The proportion of notifications that were investigated ranged from 14% in the Australian Capital Territory to 100% in Queensland (Figure 2.1).

![Bar chart showing the proportion of notifications investigated and dealt with by other means by state and territory for 2010–11. The chart indicates that the proportion of notifications investigated varies significantly across states and territories, with the Australian Capital Territory having the lowest proportion (14%) and Queensland having the highest (100%).]

Nationally, almost 118,000 of the notifications investigated (92%) were reported as closed as of 31 August 2011. Closed investigations include those considered finalised and those recorded as closed with no outcome possible (99,649 and 17,954, respectively). The remaining 8% of investigations (10,156) were in process at the time of reporting (Table A1.1).
Substantiations of notifications by Indigenous status, states and territories (per 1,000)

Compared with non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were seven and a half times more likely to be the subject of a child protection substantiation (34.6 per 1,000 compared with 4.5 per 1,000 Table 2.4 above)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number per 1,000 children</th>
<th>Rate ratio Indigenous/non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW&lt;sup&gt;(a)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3,303</td>
<td>8,194</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>6,557</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>1,731</td>
<td>4,032</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA&lt;sup&gt;(b)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas&lt;sup&gt;(c)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>8,231</td>
<td>22,144</td>
<td>1,152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4

Compared with non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were seven and a half times more likely to be the subject of a child protection substantiation (34.6 per 1,000 compared with 4.5 per 1,000 Table 2.4 above)
Issues in Child Protection

• Increasing reports / notifications – inadequate response

• Concern that definitions of abuse and neglect are too broad – ‘risk of harm’ vs ‘significant harm’

• Under-reporting and over-reporting

• Concern about forensic investigative response rather than holistic response to child’s needs – 2002 inquiry

• Poor risk assessment? Unrealistic expectations. Need for proper assessment re immediate safety, risk of harm

• Need for proactive preventive approach, not just reactive response
Care and protection orders 2010-2011

• Across Australia, about 39,000 children and young people were on a care and protection order at 30 June 2011.
• While a large proportion of orders were relatively short (less than 12 months), almost one quarter of those discharged from orders in 2010–11 had spent between 2 and 4 years on that order, and more than 1 in 10 had spent over eight years.
Children’s Court proceedings

• The Children’s Court may make an Emergency Care and protection Order if it is satisfied that the child is at risk of serious harm

• This is a short term care order for 14 days which may be extended to 28 days

• It is an order suitable for short term risk minimisation or assessment e.g. where a parent has been admitted to hospital or sent to jail

• An application may be made to the Children’s Court for a care order where the Director General seeks a long term care order or an assessment order or a supervision order or undertakings from the parents
Out-of-home care 2010-2011

- Nationally, just over 37,500 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2011. Over the last few years the rate per 1,000 children in out-of-home care has increased nationally (from about 28,500 at 30 June 2007). This increase is mainly the result of the cumulative impact of children who remain in care for extended periods.

- In contrast to these overall increases, annual admissions to and discharges from out-of-home care are showing opposing trends. Over the past 5 years, more children are being released from care annually, and relatively fewer admitted.
Number of children aged 0-17 years in out-of-home-care, states and territories, 30th June 1997 to 30 June, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>5,486</td>
<td>3,393</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>1,050</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>14,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5,603</td>
<td>3,615</td>
<td>2,346</td>
<td>1,093</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>14,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>6,359</td>
<td>3,581</td>
<td>2,613</td>
<td>1,192</td>
<td>1,045</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>15,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7,041</td>
<td>3,867</td>
<td>2,634</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>16,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>7,786</td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>3,011</td>
<td>1,436</td>
<td>1,175</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>18,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>8,084</td>
<td>3,918</td>
<td>3,257</td>
<td>1,494</td>
<td>1,196</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>18,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>8,636</td>
<td>4,046</td>
<td>3,787</td>
<td>1,615</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>20,297</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>9,145</td>
<td>4,309</td>
<td>4,413</td>
<td>1,681</td>
<td>1,204</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>9,230</td>
<td>4,408</td>
<td>5,657</td>
<td>1,829</td>
<td>1,329</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>23,695</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>9,896</td>
<td>4,794</td>
<td>5,876</td>
<td>1,968</td>
<td>1,497</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>25,454</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>11,843</td>
<td>5,052</td>
<td>5,972</td>
<td>2,371</td>
<td>1,678</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>28,379</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>13,566</td>
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<td>6,670</td>
<td>2,546</td>
<td>1,841</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>425</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2,016</td>
<td>808</td>
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<td>34,069</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>16,175</td>
<td>5,469</td>
<td>7,350</td>
<td>2,737</td>
<td>2,188</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>35,895</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 11,613 children admitted to out-of-home-care during 2010-11, 42% were aged less than 5 (4,789). Almost one-quarter (23% or 2,677) were aged between 5 and 9 and a further quarter (24% or 2,798) between 10 and 14. Children aged 15-17 represented only 11% (1,258) of all children admitted to out-of-home-care in 2010-11.
Children admitted to out-of-home-care 2010-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 5</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 9</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 14</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 17</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nationally, the rate of children in out-of-home-care at 30th June 2011 was 7.3 per 1,000 children, ranging from 4.6 per 1,000 in Victoria to 10.2 in New South Wales and the Northern Territory.
## Children in out-of-home-care by number per 1,000 children aged 0-17 and Indigenous status, states and territories 30\textsuperscript{th} June 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/territory</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number per 1,000 children</th>
<th>Rate ratio Indigenous/non-Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
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<td>Australia</td>
<td>12,358</td>
<td>24,929</td>
<td>37,848</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Main Issues in Out of Home Care

• Multi-problem families especially parental violence, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness

• Particular concern re infants and neglect esp. Indigenous families

• Managing reunification – longer term support needed

• Increasing concern about failures of system

• Planned transfer of OOHC to non government sector

• Shortage of appropriate foster carers esp. Indigenous families
  – Increasing expectations
  – Increasingly difficult care-giving

• Lack of specialist workers – low priority work, relationship with children?
Implications

• Sustainability

• Dealing with increased ‘reporting’

• Dealing with increased abuse, neglect, inadequate parenting

• Resources for children in out-of-home care

• Indigenous children

• Coherence of legislation, policy and practice
After Care Assistance and Support

- Young persons who are leaving statutory OOHC have the right to be provided appropriate assistance by the Minister having regard for their safety, welfare and wellbeing.
- This assistance may be provided between the ages of 15 and 25 and may include:
  1. provision of information about available resources and services, and
  2. assistance based on an assessment of need, including financial assistance and assistance for obtaining accommodation, setting up house, education and training, finding employment, legal advice and accessing health services, and
  3. counselling and support.
- Young persons who have left OOHC have the right to access their files and the right to have the original documents on their files e.g. birth certificate, school reports photographs.
Reasons for Increased Reports, Substantiations

- Broadened definitions of abuse and neglect
  - e.g. physical abuse/punishment; exposure to violence
- Lowered threshold – ‘risk of harm’ / “serious psychological harm”
- Expansion of mandatory reporting ...
- Defensive reporting - $22,000 fine ?
- Frustrated reporting – renotifications – lack of services?
- Increased recording – centralised call centres cf local CSCs
- Gateway to early intervention services via child protection system in NSW?
- Increased ‘investigations ◊ [more substantiations]
- Increasing societal ‘risk aversiveness’ – decreasing tolerance
- Increasing incidence /awareness of parental substance abuse, family violence, mental health
Community Perceptions

- Rising awareness within the community about maltreatment
- Shift in social values elevating standards of parenting
- Broadened concept of where childhood starts and ends
- Privileging of ‘expert’ over family and community in preventing and responding to child abuse & neglect
- Child protection primarily responsibility of one government department
Science and Social Work

- Science and technology in practice: risk assessment tools, computers
- Implication that abuse and neglect can be reliably predicted
- Criticism if ‘wrong’ decision made 
  e.g. media attention child deaths
- Risk management approaches evident
Child Protection and Families ‘in Need’

- High numbers of notifications - large administrative burden for processing these
- Total reports comprise relatively small number of children who need a child protection response
- Over burdened system – labelling but no service
- Majority of families reported are ‘in need’ and likely to be re-referred if no preventive action is taken
The Role of Child Protection

• With a wide net, left with the fundamental question:
  
  What is the role of child protection services?

• Originally set up to provide a crisis response

• Crisis response not working for families ‘in need’

• Still need ‘forensic’ and ‘court’ responses

• Need for partnership with families/parents

• Need to focus on outcomes for children beyond the focus on actions of parents
## Forensic Approach Versus Holistic Approach

<table>
<thead>
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<th>FORENSIC</th>
<th>HOLISTIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Search for evidence</td>
<td>• Focus on early intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What happened to whom?</td>
<td>• Less adversarial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who is responsible</td>
<td>• What is needed to ensure child’s safety, welfare and wellbeing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive assessment</td>
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<td>Context and cumulative harm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Range of options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on substantiating allegations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on individual incidents of reported abuse/neglect</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A Time of Reform/Drivers of Reform

- Significant reform agendas have been or are being implemented across Australia
- Since 2002 every jurisdiction embarked on a substantial reform agenda
  - reforms to practice frameworks
  - new legislation
  - dedicated ‘child protection’ department
- Dated legislative and practice frameworks
  (e.g., WA legislation from 1940s)
- Self-initiated research and review
  (e.g., Victoria ‘killer statistic’)
- External inquiries
  (e.g., Queensland CMC Inquiry)
- New South Wales ‘Wood Inquiry’
Approaches to Reform

• Broadly, two types of reform: *planned* vs. *responsive* reform

• Responsive more likely than planned to:
  • occur in the public/media ‘spotlight’
  • be implemented quickly

• Media scrutiny may influence reform direction or pace

• May be a combination of planned & responsive reform

• Reviewing the structure of the whole service system (not a single department)
  • Role of government
  • Way in which services (primary, secondary & tertiary) are delivered
  • Whole of government response
Key Challenges for Enhancing the Protection of Children in Australia

- Demand for statutory services
- Building prevention services (esp. for families in need)
- Enhancing and monitoring practice consistency and quality
- Reforming policy and practice frameworks and implementing reforms
- Recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce
- Implementing and enhancing culturally appropriate interventions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and services to assist preventing their over-representation in statutory care and protection services
- Provision of a quality out-of-home care service
- Breaking down silos (b/w Statutory Department., NGOs, practitioners)
- Families with multiple complex problems (esp. parental substance abuse, DV, mental health and chronic re-entry)
- Provision of the necessary tools for staff to perform their respective roles (e.g. information systems)
- Community education (i.e., managing community expectations of CP Department., CP is everyone’s responsibility)
Strategic Directions in Service Provision and Policy Reform

• Broadly, state and territory departments were directing reform to those areas identified as key challenges

• Multiple strategies were being implemented to address critical challenges

• Reflecting the focus on ‘joined-up solutions for joined-up problems’:
  – Strategies and directions to be generally inter-related; and
  – Individual strategies targeted several different key challenges

• Major reforms under six themes:
  – An integrated service system
  – Breadth and Quality services
  – Practice principles
  – Providing an Indigenous response
  – Quality out-of-home care
  – Trained stable workforce
  – Evidence-informed policy and practice
Sources of Hope...

Greater move toward evaluation
Early findings suggest some success in responding to key challenges
Promising practice

The Victorian Innovations Program
  – Implemented to respond to those families ‘in need’ who are repeatedly referred to child protection
  – Reduction in notifications & re-notifications

The South Australian *Sustained Nurse Home Visiting* program
  – Nursing service for all families with a new baby
  – Home visiting offered to those families with higher needs

Early data shows, over 80% of women accept offer, higher Indigenous take-up

MAYFS *Panyappi Indigenous Mentoring*
  – To enhance sense of identity, belonging and competence for Indigenous young people who were offending or engaging risk taking behaviours
  – Reduced involvement in criminal activity, increased school attendance, greater stability

Family Life’s *Creating Capable Communities*
  – Strengthen social connections to create safe, healthy and supportive communities on housing estates
  – Reduced involvement with child protection and police, greater community participation, ownership of community

Brighter futures program, NSW
Use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

- In all decisions the Director General is to consider the appropriateness of ADR designed to:
  - Resolve disputes expediently using mediation, family group conferencing
  - Reduce the likelihood of a care application
  - Reduce the likelihood of the estrangement of adolescents from their parents
  - To work toward consent orders that are in the best interests of the child/young person concerned where a care application has been commenced
  Examples: Parental Responsibility Contract, Registered Care Plan
References

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Lamont, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)
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