

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Finocchiaro to the Minister for Territory Families:

Children's Commissioner Annual Report

- 1. Why are only 44 per cent of Child Protection investigations being completed within 28 days? (and only 10 per cent for investigations of children in care)?**

ANSWER:

There are a number of minimum and recommended requirements for Territory Families when undertaking a Child Protection investigation.

An investigation is only complete when enough information has been gathered to determine whether a child has suffered harm or neglect and whether they are in need of protection.

Territory Families has a target to complete investigations in 28 days. Due to complex family dynamics, increased numbers of investigations and increased focus on a detailed assessment of cumulative harm, full information gathering and engagement with families can exceed 28 days. Territory Families prioritises a thorough investigation of child safety and risk over completing a time limited investigation.

A completion rate of 44% of child protection cases within 28 days is higher than the national average for completion of investigations (Report on Government Services 2018) and most states have targets longer than 28 days.

- 2. Why have nearly 50 per cent of Aboriginal children in care had more than one placement in 17/18? What is the Government doing to ensure stability for children?**

ANSWER:

Placement changes for children in care are usually planned events, tailored to the individual needs of the child. All changes are undertaken through a collaborative approach which minimises the impact of the placement change on the child.

There are a number of factors which may influence a placement change for a child in care including returning to parents, transitioning to a Kinship, family or specific Foster Care placement or a child with complex needs requiring a placement which can provide specialist care. In some cases an unplanned placement change can occur following an allegation of harm to a child in care or an unforeseen emergency event in the Carer family. Each placement change is assessed and managed on an individual basis taking into account the individual child needs.

Territory Families is undertaking wide ranging reform of the Out-of-Home Care system which will contribute to stability for children, including:

- Review of policy and procedures for Permanent Care Orders;
- Increased investment of \$4.2 million over four years to increase family finding and support for Kinship Carers;
- Implementing the Signs of Safety practice framework which will engage families and communities earlier in decisions about their children;
- Improvements to the placement matching system to make better decisions at the point of placement; and
- Implementation of an Aboriginal Out-of-Home Care Strategy to enable Aboriginal organisations and communities to deliver and lead the provision of place-based Out-Of-Home Care services to Aboriginal, children, families and the community.

3. Why have nearly 500 children had a subsequent substantiation within 12 months? Why has the Government not met the Key Performance Indicator for the percentage of subsequent substantiations?

ANSWER:

Territory Families established a new Key Performance Indicator for 2018-19 of:

- Indicator: Proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation in the previous financial year, who were the subject of a subsequent substantiation within 12 months.
- 2018-19 Target: 24 per cent. While this is a new target for 2018-19, Territory Families included 2016-17 and 2017-18 data as part of the 2017-18 Annual Report. The 2017-18 performance exceeded the target of 24 per cent, with 26 per cent of children with a substantiation subject to a substantiation in the prior 12 months.

Territory Families intends that increased case work with families subject to substantiation of harm to children, which does not meet the threshold of removal, will reduce repeated harm to children through Strengthening Families case management and expanded Intensive Family Preservation Services.

There are many potential reasons for re-substantiation that do not necessarily indicate further harm or a lack of response. Each child and family circumstance is assessed individually.

4. Child Protection notifications have increased by about 2,000 each year and Investigations are steadily increasing too. Substantiation numbers have remained the same for 5 years. Why is this the case and are genuine instances of harm being unsubstantiated?

ANSWER:

Substantiations of harm have increased by 40 per cent over the last five years.

	2013-14	2017-18	Change
Notifications Received	12,936	24,743	91%
Investigations Finalised	4,303	10,448	143%
Investigations Substantiated	1,685	2,366	40%

*As per Territory Families Annual Report 2017-18

Growth in notifications has been impacted by technological improvements including Northern Territory Police commencing electronic transmission of referrals to Territory Families in 2013. This has contributed to multiple notifications and investigations of individual children.

As provided in evidence to the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, introduction of an early form of One Child, One Case resulted in the closure of multiple concurrent investigations of the same child contributing to a lessening of the impact of increased investigations flowing through to substantiations and ensuring a more comprehensive approach to case managing individual children.

5. Will budget pressures have an impact on increasing demands on Child Protection Services? Will thresholds for intervention and service delivery be altered due to budget constraints?

ANSWER:

No. Thresholds for intervention are set by the *Care and Protection of Children Act* and the Care and Protection Policy Manual.

6. How many Aboriginal Foster and Kinship Carers are currently caring for aboriginal children? How many aboriginal children are being cared for by non-aboriginal carers? Please provide data as at 15 November 2018.

ANSWER:

As at 31 October 2018, there were 545 children in 336 Foster and Kinship places of care.

How many Aboriginal Foster and Kinship Carers are currently caring for Aboriginal children?

As at 31 October 2018, there were 246 children in 162 Aboriginal Foster and Kinship places of care.

How many Aboriginal children are being cared for by non-Aboriginal Carers?

As at 31 October 2018, there were 249 children in 150 non-Aboriginal Foster and Kinship places of care.

A Place of Care is deemed Aboriginal when at least one Carer is identified as Aboriginal.

- 7. How many Aboriginal Foster and Kinship Carers have been recruited since the Government's commitment of \$4.2 million to support and recruit Aboriginal Foster and Kinship Carers?**

ANSWER:

The additional funding was committed in April 2018. Between 1 April 2018 and 31 October 2018 an additional 54 Aboriginal places of care have commenced. A place of care is defined as Aboriginal if one or more Carers in the household identify as Aboriginal.

Financial Year	Month	Aboriginal Foster Places of Care commencing
2017-18	April	11
2017-18	May	2
2017-18	June	7
2018-19	July	8
2018-19	August	8
2018-19	September	7
2018-19	October	11
Total:		54

- 8. The Children's Commissioner made 82 preliminary enquiries on complaints to the Commissioner. In those enquiries on how many occasions did the Office of the Children's Commissioner speak with the child who was the subject of the complaint?**

ANSWER:

Territory Families is unable to respond to the work of the Office of the Children's Commissioner. The question should be redirected to the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

- 9. Page 66 of the Children's Commissioner's Annual Report states that formal reporting of 16 harm and exploitation in care cases pursuant to section 84C of the *Care and Protection of Children Act* from the 17/18 reporting period had not been received by the Commissioner at the time of her reporting and excluded from analysis. Out of these 16 cases, how many of the investigations were completed within 28 days? Please break down by priority 1, 2 and 3 cases.**

ANSWER:

The 16 cases related to point of time data at the end of June 2018.

On internal review, the substantiation outcome changed for four of these. Of the 12 cases that proceeded to substantiation and were subsequently notified to the Children's Commissioner after 30 June 2018, three were priority one cases and the remaining nine were priority two cases. All 12 investigations were completed in more than 28 days. A report screened in for a Section 84 investigation can only receive a priority one or two response rating.