



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 139

WRITTEN QUESTION

J Davis to the Minister for Children and Families and Minister for Child Protection,
Hon Robyn Cahill OAM MLA:

Aboriginal children in out of home care

1. **During the reporting period (1 July 2024 to 31 March 2025), how many Aboriginal children required a placement under the Care and Protection of Children Act 2007?**

As of 31 March 2025, 783 children in out-of-home care (OoHC) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

A child's first choice of care placement, where possible, is with an authorised family or kinship carer, or with an authorised foster carer when family or kin cannot be found.

The Department of Children and Families (the Department) funds Aboriginal Carer Services to find, assess and support kinship carers. The Department's Child Protection Practitioners and Aboriginal Community Workers also support families to identify relatives who may be suitable to provide care.

This work takes place both before and after a child enters care, recognising that family circumstances often change over time.

2. **How many (what proportion) of these children were placed in:**
 - a. **kinship care with a member of their family? (this person can be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal)**
 - b. **the care of an Aboriginal person in the child's community?**
 - c. **the care of any other Aboriginal person?**

As of 31 March 2025, 177 (23%) of children in OoHC who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were placed with an Aboriginal carer household.

Table 1: Aboriginal Carer Households by Placement Type as of 31 March 2025

Placement Type – Aboriginal Household	Number of unique children	Proportion
Family / Significant Other	39	22%
Foster	137	77%
Purchased Home Based Care	1	1%
Grand Total	177	100%

Note: Data presented above shows unique children by active placement as of 31 March 2025. Data provided for the Estimates Hearings reported that 224 (29%) of children in OoHC were placed with an Aboriginal carer as a key performance indicator. This variance is due to a child having multiple placements (e.g. shared caring arrangement across 2 separate households).

3. How many (what proportion) of these children were placed in the care of a non-Aboriginal person?

As of 31 March 2025, 606 (77%) of children in OoHC who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were placed in the care of a non-Aboriginal carer household.

4. Against what criteria did the decision maker decide that each of these non-Aboriginal people was sensitive to the child's needs and capable of supporting the child to develop and maintain a connection with the child's family, community, culture, traditions, language and country?

a. If it was on the recommendation of the child's case worker or similar, how did that person assess the sensitivity of the care giver?

All potential carers are required to undergo an assessment to determine their suitability to become a carer. These assessments are undertaken in accordance with the Care and Protection of Children (Placement Arrangement) Regulations 2010 (the Regulations). Under the Regulations, the responsibilities of a carer include:

- i. assisting the child to maintain or recover his or her personal, familial and cultural identity; and
- ii. complying with, and assisting with implementation of, the care plan for the child.

The assessment determines whether a carer is able to meet the cultural needs of any child placed in their care and engages carers in a line of questioning to determine their ability to support the child to develop and maintain a connection with family, community, culture, language and country.

Assessments are conducted by staff local to where the carers live, to facilitate assessments informed by knowledge of the community context including familial relationships, community strengths and access to support services.

5. What practical measures were put in place to enable a connection with the child's family, community, culture, traditions, language and country?

Department Case Managers develop an individual Care Plan through speaking with the child or young person, their family and natural network, and/or other important people who are involved in providing for the child or young person's needs.

The Care Plan is tailored to outline needs and goals that promote stability for the child or young person, addressing their physical, emotional, educational, social and cultural needs across immediate, short and long-term timeframes.

Practical measures to implement a care plan include:

- supporting travel arrangements for the child to travel to community or have family members visit the child;
- promotion of contact with family members through phone and video calls;
- participation of young children in play groups hosted by Aboriginal community controlled organisations; and
- participation in cultural, social and recreational opportunities which celebrate Aboriginal culture.

6. If this access is dependent on the child's individual care plan, when was the last review or audit conducted of the quality of care plans?

Care Plans are completed every 12 months, with a review undertaken at 6 months.

7. Considering the ACPP requires the department to know whether a potential carer is Aboriginal or not (as per the explanatory note) why are approved carers are not required to disclose (or not to record) their Aboriginal status? What impact does this have on:

- a. the department's ability to correctly place Aboriginal according to the ACPP?**
- b. the validity of the department's data regarding compliance with the ACPP?**

Forms utilised by the Department request that persons identify whether or not they identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Details of a carer's cultural background are entered in the Department's client information management system (CMS). In instances where this information has not been entered into the part of CMS from where the data is extracted, the system would identify this as an anomaly, triggering quality assurance activity on the identified records.