



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 262

WRITTEN QUESTION

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

Child Protection Workforce

1. In 2025 the Minister stated there was an overall 40 per cent vacancy rate in child protection, with 36 vacancies in Central Australia at that time. What is the current vacancy rate for child protection positions?
 - a. Please provide a breakdown by region.

Table 1: Child protection workforce by region/business unit as of 30 June 2026 (all streams)

Region	Total Positions	Vacant Positions*	Vacancy Rate
Arnhem Region	35	19	54%
Barkly Region	27	11	41%
Big River Region	93	40	43%
Central Australia Region	127	52	41%
Greater Darwin Region	128	42	33%
NT Wide Services	41	19	46%
Practice Development Directorate	27	12	44%
Top End Region	58	33	57%
Overall total	536	228	43%

**Vacant positions include staff on leave.*

Table 2: Child protection workforce professional stream by region/ business unit as of 30 June 2026

Region	Total Positions	Vacant Positions*	Vacancy Rate
Arnhem Region	19	12	63%
Barkly Region	14	5	36%
Big River Region	38	12	32%
Central Australia Region	61	22	36%
Greater Darwin Region	84	30	36%
NT Wide Services	32	13	37%
Practice Development Directorate	23	10	43%
Top End Region	33	15	45%
Overall Total	304	119	39%

**Vacant positions include staff on leave.*

Table 3: Child Protection Practitioner positions as of 30 June 2026

Region	Total Positions	Vacant Positions*	Occupied Positions	Vacancy Rate
Arnhem Region	12	9	3	75%
Barkly Region	10	3	7	30%
Big River Region	23	9	14	39%
Central Australia Region	41	17	24	41%
Greater Darwin Region	58	23	35	40%
NT Wide Services	19	9	10	47%
Top End Region	22	10	12	45%
Overall	185	80	105	43%

**Vacant positions include staff on leave.*

Table 4: Child Protection Practitioner positions actually and nominally vacant as at 30 June 2026

Region	Total Positions	Vacant Positions	Occupied Positions	Vacancy Rate
Arnhem Region	12	6	6	50%
Barkly Region	10	1	9	10%
Big River Region	23	6	17	26%
Central Australia Region	41	7	34	17%

Greater Darwin Region	58	8	50	14%
NT Wide Services	19	3	16	16%
Top End Region	22	9	13	41%
Overall	185	40	145	22%

- b. Where a figure for an individual region, service or category is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total.**

Refer to response to Question 1.a. - Tables 1-3.

- c. The Northern Territory Coroner, in the findings of the inquests into the deaths of Miss Yunupingu, Ngeygo Ragurk, Kumarn Rubuntja and Kumanjayi Haywood [2024] NTLC 14, delivered on 25 November 2024, recorded evidence that 39.8 per cent of the Department's child protection positions across the Territory were vacant. Was that figure accurate as at the date of that evidence, and what is the equivalent figure now?**

The Department of Children and Families' (DCF) child protection workforce vacancy rate as of 30 June 2026, as provided in response to Question 1.a. (Tables 1-3), is consistent with the rate provided as evidence to the NT Coroner.

- d. For each region, and for the Territory as a whole, please state as at 30 June 2026 the number of child protection positions funded, the number filled, and the number vacant.**

Refer to Table 3 above.

- e. What is the average and the highest number of open cases held by a case manager in each region?**

Caseloads are currently reported as point-in-time measures, based on data as of 31 March each year (refer to Table 4 below).

Targeted caseload reporting is currently in development and will support ongoing monitoring and reporting of caseload trends throughout the year.

Table 4: Average and highest number of open cases held by case carrying officers by region

Region	Average* (as of 31 March)	Highest (as of 31 March)
Arnhem	14	23
Barkly	11	20
Big Rivers	13	74

Central Australia	12	35
Greater Darwin	14	37
Top End	22	40
Other	12	44

**Average and maximum case-carrying officer caseloads are calculated based on cases allocated to individual officers, rather than the total number of cases recorded for the region. Workload management strategies may include cases being managed by Directors, Managers, Team Leaders, administrative or professional staff, or through centralised arrangements.*

- 2. The 2024–25 Annual Report shows \$4.941 million was spent on salaries for the 21 key management personnel — around 6 per cent of the total staffing budget. Given existing vacancies and workload pressures, how does the Government justify this allocation at senior levels?**

The allocation to key management personnel reflects the leadership, governance and accountability required to manage a large and complex department. Executive staff secure funding, manage risk, ensure statutory compliance and coordinate whole-of-government responses that support frontline service delivery.

DCF continues to manage vacancies and workload pressures, with strong executive leadership critical to prioritising resources, supporting workforce sustainability, and ensuring frontline staff can focus on delivering services to children, young people and families.

- 3. What proportion of the Department’s budget is allocated to assessing reports that are ultimately unsubstantiated?**

In 2026-27, allocated budget for the Central Intake Team (CIT) is \$4.23 million. Each child protection notification received is assessed by CIT to determine the matters that will screen into a child protection response and those that will not. In 2025-26, 11,888 (39%) notifications were screened out because a child protection response was deemed as not required.

The total budget allocated to regional child protection services in 2026-27 is \$21.24 million. Each child protection notification that proceeds to a Child Protection Investigation (CPI) is assessed, with full assessment required to determine whether the CPI will be substantiated or unsubstantiated. Of the 4,247 CPI’s completed in 2025-26, 74% were not substantiated.

- 4. Budget Paper No. 3 for 2026–27 expresses the measure “child protection investigations commenced” as a maximum — no more than 5,000 — and reports 4,100 for 2025–26, attributing the variation to “a decrease in notifications and fewer matters progressing to investigation”. The 2026–27 target remains no more than 5,000.**

- a. How many notifications were received in each of the three years to 2025–26, how many were screened in for investigation, and how many were screened out?

Table 5: Overview of notifications activity 2023-24 to 2025-26

Financial Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Number of notifications/contacts	30,028	30,485	30,609
Screened in as child protection notifications	22,954	24,684 ¹	18,721
Screened out (no child protection response required)	7,074	5,801	11,888

¹ *This figure has been produced using an updated counting methodology and is not directly comparable with figures reported for 2024-25.*

- b. Of the reduction in investigations in 2025-26, how much is attributable to fewer notifications received and how much to fewer notifications progressing to investigation?**

Although the actual number of commenced CPIs decreased between 2024-25 and 2025-26, the proportionality of CPIs commenced remained the same across both years.

Table 3: Notifications and CPI cases commenced 2023-24 to 2025-26

Financial Year	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Number of notifications screened in	22,954	24,684	18,721
CPIs commenced	4,304	5,602	4,247
CPI commenced - proportion	18.8%	22.7%	22.7%

- c. Have the criteria or thresholds for progressing a notification to investigation changed since 1 July 2024? If so, on what date, in which document, and approved by whom?**

There have been no changes to criteria or thresholds for progressing a notification to investigation since 1 July 2024.

- d. Why is this measure expressed as a maximum, so that fewer investigations is recorded as better performance, and when was that framing last reviewed?**

The measure is expressed as a maximum as it is intended to monitor the extent to which children and families are diverted from statutory CPI where a suitable earlier response is available.

While the number of notifications will vary, improved early intervention, referral and family support pathways should result in fewer matters requiring investigation. Reduced CPIs is therefore recorded as better performance where this reflects appropriate diversion and support following notification, rather than reduced identification of child safety concerns.

The framing was reviewed by DCF through the 2026-27 Budget Paper Key Performance Indicator (KPI) development process. The target remains a continuing KPI from 2023-24 and is based on maintaining CPIs commenced at fewer than 5,000 annually. This target reflects DCF's focus on improving pathways into suitable family support or other services, consistent with Northern Territory (NT) and national strategic objectives.

e. What measure, if any, records whether children the subject of a notification screened out were subsequently the subject of a further notification, and what is that figure?

DCF does not currently report a measure that records whether children who are the subject of a notification that is screened out are subsequently the subject of a further notification.

Enhancements to future reporting capability are being programmed, including improved monitoring of outcomes and subsequent contact with the child protection system following screening decisions.