



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 271

WRITTEN QUESTION

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

Out of Home Care: Costs and Kinship Care

1. How many children are currently in purchased home-based care?

As of 30 June 2026, 505 children were placed in Purchased Home-Based Care (PHBC).

a. If length of stay in purchased home-based care is not compiled, in which system is placement start and end date recorded, and in what format?

Placement start and end dates are recorded against each placement in the Department of Children and Families' (DCF) client information system, CARE.

2. What is the average length of stay in purchased home-based care (PHBC)?

DCF does not report a simple average length of stay in PHBC. Consistent with national reporting standards, duration is reported as the length of time a child has been in their current continuous PHBC placement as of 30 June 2026.

Duration in PHBC (as of 30 June 2026)	Children	%
Less than 1 month	54	10.7
1 month to less than 6 months	176	34.9
6 months to less than 1 year	100	19.8
1 year to less than 2 years	53	10.5
2 years to less than 5 years	66	13.1
5 years or more	56	11.1
Total	505	100

3. What is the Government's plan to transition children into foster, kinship or other stable long-term care arrangements?

Out-of-home care (OOHC) reform prioritises safe reunification and family-based care. Where reunification is not safe, the preferred pathway is family or

kinship care, followed by foster care, with other types of specialist care to be reserved for children with complex needs.

The reform will strengthen family finding, kinship mapping, reunification support and the foster and kinship carer base; improve carer recruitment, assessment, training and support; and clarify referral and transition pathways.

4. Is there commitment in this budget to an independent monitoring mechanism for child removal, identified by the Productivity Commission as critical to closing the gap?

There is no specific 2026-27 budget commitment in place for an independent monitoring mechanism for child removal.

a. How much has been allocated for the coming 12 months, and for ensuing years?

Not applicable.

5. Demographic information for some children in purchased home-based care is unknown. How many children does this affect, and why does the Department not hold this information?

As of 30 June 2026, sex and region were recorded for all 505 children in PHBC. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status was not recorded for 5 children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is based on self-identification by the child or their family and is recorded once that information has been provided.

a. Where a figure is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total.

The above figures are Territory-wide totals.

6. Please provide a cost comparison of the current delivery models of out-of-home care for a 5-year-old child with no complexity issues, comparing purchased home-based care with placement with an authorised departmental carer:

a. annual cost; and

b. weekly cost.

OOHC Placement Type	Weekly Cost \$	Annual Cost¹ \$
Foster or kinship carer (urban) Rate as at September 2026	299.07	15,551.64
Foster or kinship carer (remote) Rate as at September 2026	328.97	17,106.44
PHBC	1,989.40	103,448.80

¹ Weekly cost x 52 weeks

7. The answer to Written Question No. 139 of the 15th Assembly reported 783 children in out-of-home care identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as of 31 March 2025. Across the out-of-home care budget:

a. How many children are currently in care across the Northern Territory, and how many identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

As of 30 June 2026, there were 852 children in OOHC in the NT, of whom 764 (90%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

b. How many are placed with purchased home-based carers, and what is the total annualised cost of those placements?

As of 30 June 2026, 505 of these children were placed in PHBC, of which 497 identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The 2025-26 total annualised cost for PHBC was \$44.7 million.

c. How many are placed with authorised departmental carers, and what is the total cost of that stream?

As of 30 June 2026, 269 children were placed with carers authorised by DCF: 176 with foster carers and 93 with kinship carers.

The 2025-26 total cost of that stream was \$10.2 million, comprising \$6.7 million for foster care services and \$3.5 million for kinship care services.

d. Please state whether each figure counts unique children by active placement or counts placements.

Each figure counts unique children by their active placement as of 30 June 2026. Each child is counted once.

e. If the cost of a placement is not recorded against the individual placement, at what level is it recorded — provider contract, region, or care type?

The recording of costs against placements is dependent upon the individual care type and the funding arrangement.

The cost of foster and kinship care placements, where payments are processed through the CARE system, are recorded against the individual.

However, a child in an ITRC placement does not have an individual cost attached as these are paid outside of the CARE system.

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

OOHC Placement Type	2025-26 Actual Cost \$000
Foster Care	6,717
Kinship Care	3,513
PHBC	44,718
Residential Places of Care	29,043
Individual Packages of Care	23,785
Residential Care Other ¹	847
Total	108,622

¹ This includes other types of care such as youth hostels

8. The answer to Written Question No. 593 of the 14th Assembly recorded that from the 2023-24 budget \$34.9 million went to purchased home based care, \$4.1 million to kinship care services, \$8.3 million to foster care services and \$1.1 million to the Foster and Kinship Carers Association NT. The same answer recorded that as at 31 May 2023 there were 359 children in purchased home-based care at an average total cost of \$255 per child per day, 219 children in kinship care and 385 in foster care. The answer to Written Question No. 730 recorded that in 2024-25 \$40.2 million was apportioned to purchased home based care, and that as at 31 March 2024 there were 390 children in purchased home-based care and 58 children living with kinship carers.

- a. Please provide the same figures for 2025-26 and 2026-27 - the amount budgeted for purchased home-based care, for kinship care services and for foster care services, stated separately.

OOHC Placement Type	2025-26	2026-27
Foster care	\$7.6 million	\$7.3 million
Kinship care	\$3.5 million	\$4.8 million
PHBC	\$41.4 million	\$41.4 million
FKCANT	\$1.1 million	\$1.1 million

- b. **Written Question No. 593 reported kinship care services and foster care services as separate amounts. Written Question No. 730 reported a single combined figure for "Kinship and Foster Carer Allowances". On what date, and on whose decision, did the Department stop reporting those two amounts separately?**

DCF is able to report foster and kinship carer numbers as a consolidated figure or separately depending upon what is being requested or reported on.

- c. **The number of children living with kinship carers is recorded as 219 at 31 May 2023 and 58 at 31 March 2024. Is that fall correct as reported? If it is, what caused it. If the two figures are counted on different bases, please state each basis and provide both figures on a consistent basis for each year since 2022-23.**

The reported decrease in children recorded in relative/kinship care should be interpreted with caution. Available data confirms a reduction in the number reported in the relative/kinship care category; however, the data does not identify the reason for that change.

Under national reporting arrangements, the NT generally records children placed with relatives or kin who are also registered foster carers within the foster care category rather than the relative/kinship care category. As a result, movements between the foster care and relative/kinship care categories do not necessarily reflect equivalent changes in the number of children living with relatives or kin.

While the decrease in the relative/kinship care category is reflected in the reported data, it should not be assumed to represent an equivalent reduction in the number of children placed with relatives or kin.

The table below provides children in OOHC in foster care and relative/kinship care, as of 30 June each year.

Placement type	2023	2024	2025
Foster care	230	344	255
Relative/kinship care	203	27	77
Foster and relative/kinship care combined	433	371	332

- d. **Over the same period the number of children in purchased home-based care is recorded as rising from 359 to 390. What is the current number, and the current average total cost per child per day?**

As of 30 June 2026, 505 children were in PHBC. This figure reflects a point-in-time count of active placements.

Cumulative PHBC expenditure for the 2025-26 financial year was \$44.7 million. As the number of children in care fluctuates throughout the year as placements commence and conclude, dividing this annual expenditure by a static headcount does not yield an accurate average cost per child per day.

- e. **Written Question No. 593** quoted the 2018-19 Transforming Out of Home Care report that "purchased home-based care will be phased-out in preference for family/kin and foster care". Is that commitment still Government policy? If it is, by what date is the phase-out to be complete. If it is not, on what date and by what decision was it abandoned?

DCF is working on increasing the foster and kinship carer base, however there will always be a need for some form of PHBC for times when there is no available foster or kinship carer, or there are complexities that may not allow a child to be placed with foster or kinship carers.

- f. **Has the Department modelled the cost of expanding kinship care in place of purchased home-based care? If so, can that modelling be provided?**

No modelling has been performed to date.

- g. **How does the Department reconcile the difference between those two funding streams with the rates of harm recorded in each?**

It is the preference to place children with foster and kinship carers, where there is limited or no availability other placement options must be utilised.

9. **The Department states that maintaining an Aboriginal child's connection to family and culture is a central priority in out-of-home care.**

- b. **How is this implemented in practice across the regions?**

A child's connection to family, culture and community is a mandatory requirement of each child's care planning. This requirement is consistent across regions, requiring care planning to consider development or continuation of connections to family, culture and community, where it is assessed as safe to do so, across each 12-month period.

- c. **What specific funding is allocated in this budget to Aboriginal carer services?**

For 2026-27, \$1.56 million has been allocated towards funding for services associated with Aboriginal Carer Services (ACS).

10. **Please provide a breakdown of the full-time equivalent staffing assigned to the Carer Services Team in each regional office, as a table.**

Region	FTE	Positions
Arnhem	1	2
Barkly	0	0

Region	FTE	Positions
Big Rivers	5.75	6
Central	1.92	4
Greater Darwin	4	4
Top End	2	2

11. What specific financial and programmatic resources is the Department providing for carer training in this budget cycle?

In 2026-27, \$1.1 million has been allocated to Foster and Kinship Association NT (FKANT) to advocate for carers and for carer training and support.

12. On compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in remote areas:

b. Which remote areas or communities are currently not covered by an Aboriginal carer services contract?

The ACS program covers the following towns/communities across the NT:

- Greater Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield.
- Galiwinku, Milingimbi, Gapuwiyak, Ramingining, Yirrkala and Ski Beach.
- Katherine, Beswick, Barunga, Myall, Brumby, Rockhole, Guyelken, Binjari and Weeriburn (Edith Falls) Gorge; with limited capacity to Mataranka, Jilkminggan and Pine Creek.
- Tennant Creek, Ali Curung and Elliott; with outreach to Murray Downs and Ampilatwatja.
- Alice Springs and Town Camps; with outreach to Ntaria and Santa Teresa.
- Mutitjulu, Docker River, Finke and Imanpa; with limited outreach to the wider NPY region.

There are currently no ACS funded across the Top End region.

c. What targeted strategies, cultural mapping or community outreach is the Department using in those areas to identify and support kinship carers to become authorised carers?

DCF continues to partner with FKCANT and ACS to recruit, assess and support carers who meet the standard required to provide high-quality care to children.

DCF Regional offices undertake family finding, kinship mapping and reunification support, and will undertake kinship assessments in the absence of an ACS or FKCANT.