



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 266

WRITTEN QUESTION

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

Early Intervention and Prevention Underspend

1. **Why did the Government underspend more than \$3.41 million in prevention and family support in 2025–26, while the number of children and young people brought into out-of-home care exceeded the Department's own target?**

This does not reflect an underspend. The \$3.41 million reflects a movement between the 2025-26 Budget and the 2025-26 Revised Budget for the Family Support output. This represents transfer of Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) funding for Child and Family Centers to future years when actual spend will be incurred.

- a. **Which programs and regions experienced the underspend?**

See above answer 1.

- b. **What were the reasons — for example workforce shortages, procurement delays or service gaps?**

Not applicable.

- c. **What steps are being taken to ensure allocated funds are fully utilised in 2026–27?**

DCF has robust financial management oversight and governance which monitors commissioning and expenditure. Where identified budget is carried forward to reflect commissioning readiness and timelines.

- d. **How many additional families could have been supported had those funds been fully utilised?**

Not applicable.

- e. **If no estimate of that kind has been prepared, what was the average cost per family supported under those programs in 2025–26?**

Not applicable.

- 2. **What proportion of the family support budget is specifically directed toward early intervention programs?**

Early intervention activities are not separately costed within the Family Support budget.

- a. **If early intervention is not separately costed within the family support budget, at what level is that expenditure disaggregated, and which programs are counted as early intervention?**

Early intervention expenditure is not disaggregated.

All Family Support programs fall within this category as they will have a component of early intervention at varying times in the child protection continuum, dependent on the child and/or family's individual situation.

- 3. **What evidence or evaluation data does the Government rely on to determine the effectiveness of early intervention in reducing entries into out-of-home care?**

Government assesses early intervention and FS Services (FSS) using program and provider performance data, case-level information, regional intelligence, feedback from providers and families, and relevant research.

DCF is strengthening outcomes reporting, service reviews and commissioning to better assess these services' contribution to reducing demand for statutory child protection and OOHC over time.

- 4. **How does current investment compare with the estimated cost savings from preventing children entering out-of-home care?**

This information is not currently available.

- 5. Has the Government assessed the impact on child safety of housing insecurity, poverty, workforce shortages and access to health services?**

This question should be addressed to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (CMC) for response.

- a. Which factors present the greatest risks to children in the Territory?**

Please refer to the response to Question 5.

- 6. Has advice been received that places Commonwealth funding linked to Closing the Gap outcomes at risk?**

This question should be addressed to CMC for response.

- a. If so, can the Minister provide the advice received from the Commonwealth?**

Please refer to the response to Question 6.