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**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

A new approach to national child protection data: implementation of the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set

CHILD WELFARE SERIES NO. 59



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*Authoritative information and statistics
to promote better health and wellbeing*

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2014

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Board Chair
Dr Mukesh Haikerwal AO

Director
David Kalisch

Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Digital and Media Communications Unit
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
GPO Box 570
Canberra ACT 2601
Tel: (02) 6244 1032
Email: info@aihw.gov.au

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- Department for Education and Child Development, South Australia
- Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania
- Community Services Directorate, Australian Capital Territory
- Department of Children and Families, Northern Territory.

Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CDSMC	Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CP NMDS	Child Protection National Minimum Data Set
CYCSRWG	The Children, Youth and Community Services Policy and Research Working Group
National Framework	<i>National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020</i>
RoGS	<i>Report on Government Services</i>
SCCDS	Standing Council of Community and Disability Services
SLK	statistical linkage key

Symbols

..	not applicable
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Summary

This working paper describes the development and implementation of the unit record level Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS), which was used for the first time for national reporting in *Child protection Australia 2012–13*. It accompanies the release of that report, and provides a sample of new analyses to demonstrate the types of analyses that are now possible. The paper also outlines proposed improvements for future data collections. Key points include:

- The development and implementation of the CP NMDS was undertaken over a 5-year period by the AIHW, in collaboration with the Australian Government and all states and territories. The CP NMDS includes all items that jurisdictions have agreed to provide to the AIHW for national child protection reporting.
- The collection of national child protection unit record data will enhance the evidence base, as required by the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*, (National Framework) providing a more comprehensive and accurate picture of children within the statutory child protection system in Australia than has ever been previously available. Capacity has been built into the CP NMDS to allow reporting against several new National Framework indicators and measures for the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care (following data development and quality assessment). Key new analyses from the CP NMDS include unique counts of children receiving child protection services in each jurisdiction (135,139 nationally, or 26.1 per 1,000 children); the number of substantiations per child (1 in 5 had more than 1 substantiation in 2012–13); co-occurring types of abuse and neglect; socioeconomic status; and average day measures.
- The implementation of the CP NMDS marks a major step towards improving the comparability of child protection data across jurisdictions, and positions Australia alongside only a handful of other countries with access to this type of national resource to support the monitoring of child protection services, programs and policies. The collaborative development process has been highly valuable for uncovering issues both with the unit record collection itself (for example, issues to resolve in the data collection process, as well as standard definitions for time measures required to develop care episodes) and broader data quality issues within and across jurisdictions. The consultation process between the AIHW and jurisdictions has also enriched the national understanding of the state and territory systems and differences, and provided the opportunity for practices to be shared across jurisdictions.
- While the process of developing and preparing unit record files was resource intensive for many jurisdictions, it is anticipated that future extractions will become more streamlined and the additional effort required by jurisdictions to report in the new format will be substantially reduced. There will be a strong focus on centralising and streamlining data collection activities to facilitate this outcome.
- The AIHW will continue to work with jurisdictions to resolve data quality and comparability issues and to work towards more complete data provision and reporting for 2013–14, with a view to developing a rich, longitudinal data source that can support the analysis of outcomes for children within the system. New analyses and national data linkage work will be undertaken, whilst maintaining privacy, with the aim of enhancing the evidence base for child protection. The capacity to undertake these types of new analyses is expected to increase as data quality and completeness improve.

1 Introduction

The need for national unit record level child protection data in Australia has long been recognised by all jurisdictions and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). However, competing work priorities and lack of dedicated national funding inhibited the development of this work. The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (National Framework) (COAG 2009) – endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 30 April 2009 – provided an authoritative platform to progress this data development project. It was further supported through dedicated national resources made available through the Australian Government and strong collaboration from each Australian state or territory department responsible for child protection.

Action plans under the National Framework identify specific actions, responsibilities and timeframes for implementation. The development of a unit record data collection for child protection was specifically mentioned as an action under the *Enhancing the evidence base* national priority in the first 3-year Action Plan (2009–2012) of the National Framework. This committed the Australian, state and territory governments and the non-government sector to work together to ensure children are safe and well, including reviewing and improving data collections. The second 3-year Action Plan (2012–2015) (FaHCSIA 2012) also highlighted a range of priorities under the same national priority, including implementation of unit record level data collection and a continued focus on improved consistency and quality of the underlying data.

This working paper describes the development and implementation of the unit record level Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS). It provides a sample of new analyses from the 2012–13 collection that are now possible and outlines proposed improvements for future data collections.

2 Development of the CP NMDS

This section outlines the development and implementation of the CP NMDS which was undertaken over a 5-year period. It describes the scope and content of the CP NMDS and the aims of implementing it.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the significant milestones for this work.

The specified primary outputs included:

- a national child protection database held at the AIHW which can be used for cross sectional and longitudinal analyses. The database will be updated annually with the supply of new data from jurisdictions
- a set of new analyses using unit record child protection data for inclusion in the annual *Child Protection Australia* publication
- new indicators resulting from analyses of the new data to support the National Framework.

To support this work, existing governance structures were revised to include both the Australian Government and non-government sector on relevant committees for the first time. Focused discussion and substantial development work were undertaken on indicators under the National Framework, including the identification of unit record data requirements to support reporting. The active participation of the Australian Government, including provision of dedicated funding, assisted the AIHW to progress the development of the unit record collection.

Development of the CP NMDS

2009

- State and territory ministers agreed to work with the Australian Government to improve national data collection through the development of the unit record level collection (CDSMC 2009); supported by the substantial funding commitment from the Australian Government.
- *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* released (COAG 2009a, 2009b).
- National consultation on the framework for the unit record collection and specifications for the manual (all stakeholders).
- Bilateral consultations (AIHW and each state/territory).

2010

- Manual for the pilot collection endorsed and circulated to jurisdictions.
- National data analysis system development and testing (AIHW and states/territories).
- 2010 pilot collection (2007–08 and 2008–09 data): data were provided by 3 jurisdictions (March–August) and analysed by the AIHW.
- Discussion of technical specification issues, including the prioritisation of new analyses (all stakeholders).

Final testing and implementation

2011

- Ongoing 2010 pilot collection (2007–08 and 2008–09 data): data were provided by 4 jurisdictions (February–July) and analysed by the AIHW.
- Review of the pilot collection, including development of a proposal for the implementation of a Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS).
- Ongoing consultation and development, including system development and testing (AIHW and states/territories).

2012

- Second 3-Year Action Plan 2012–2015 endorsed by the Standing Council of Community and Disability Services (SCCDS) (August), including the national priority of enhancing the evidence base. The CP NMDS development and implementation from July 2013 became specified actions in the Child and Youth Community Services Policy and Research Working Group (CYCSPRWG) work plan.
- Review and update collection manual (AIHW); subsequently endorsed and circulated to jurisdictions.
- Ongoing system development and testing (AIHW in consultation with states/territories).
- Bilateral discussions (August–October) (AIHW and states/territories).
- 2012 dress rehearsal (2010–11 and 2011–12 data) (November 2012–February 2013) (AIHW and states/territories).
- Validata tool developed to identify data validation issues to be resolved by jurisdictions prior to data submission (AIHW).

2013

- Review of the dress rehearsal (AIHW).
- Discussion of technical specification issues (AIHW and states/territories).
- Review and update data collection manual (AIHW, based on jurisdictional feedback).
- Final endorsement of the 2012–13 manual (states/territories).
- 2012–13 data collection (October 2013–May 2014) and reporting.

2014

- Ongoing 2012–13 data collection and reporting.
- Review and consolidation of the 2012–13 process.
- 2013–14 data collection and reporting.

Figure 1: Key milestones in the development and implementation of the CP NMDS, 2009–2014

2.1 What is the CP NMDS?

The CP NMDS consists of a number of files extracted from state and territory child protection administrative data sets according to nationally agreed definitions and technical specifications. The CP NMDS, by definition, includes all items that jurisdictions have agreed to provide to the AIHW for national child protection reporting. National reporting requirements currently include:

- the annual Child protection Australia reports (AIHW)
- the *Annual Report on the National Framework for Protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* (previously *The annual report to the Council of Australian Governments – including reporting against administrative data measures for the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care*)
- the annual Report on Government Services (RoGS) (the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision).

Data items to allow reporting in identified priority areas (such as disability, cultural and linguistic diversity and locality) to support future reporting under the National Framework were also included in the CP NMDS.

The state and territory departments and the AIHW jointly fund the annual collation, analysis and publication of child protection data; and the AIHW is the data custodian.

2.2 What were the aims of implementing the CP NMDS?

The AIHW has collected aggregate child protection data provided by the departments responsible for child protection in each jurisdiction on an annual basis since 1993, under an agreement between the Australian Government, the states and territories, and the AIHW. The move to unit record data aimed to overcome issues with the aggregate data collection and enhance the evidence base required by the National Framework.

Child protection Australia reports previously only provided a 'once a year' snapshot of children in each component of the system (that is, notifications, investigations, substantiations; care and protection orders; and out-of-home care). The specific limitations of the aggregate data collection included:

- the inability to:
 - report on the total number of children receiving child protection services in each jurisdiction
 - count children receiving multiple services, or
 - examine pathways of children across the components of service(s) received
- no capacity to further interrogate or validate the data at a national level due to the collection of data in pre-determined tables (for example, it was not possible to undertake cross-analysis of data items from separately supplied tables)
- masking of data comparability issues.

The CP NMDS is a much richer data set that allows a range of more meaningful analyses to be produced using a consistent, nationally-agreed methodology. It provides an evidence base for informing policies and service delivery which relate to child welfare and family

support, and a more comprehensive and accurate picture of child abuse and neglect in Australia. It includes a range of new analyses such as:

- co-occurrence of abuse types
- number and characteristics of children returning to the child protection system from previous years
- experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system compared to that of non-Indigenous children.

Although some jurisdictions had previously undertaken some of these analyses, these were typically carried out on an ad hoc basis using local data specifications. The use of the CP NMDS allows these types of analyses to be carried out regularly and in a more consistent manner with a national focus.

The inclusion of relevant data items in the specifications for the CP NMDS will also facilitate future expanded reporting for child protection indicators/measures flagged for development under the National Framework (COAG 2009) and/or National Standards for Out-of-home Care (FaHCSIA 2011). Further, the ability to interrogate the dataset allows data analysis to be more responsive to emerging areas of policy interest due to the absence of the pre-determined limits of the aggregate collection.

The comparability of child protection data across jurisdictions has improved as a result of the move to a NMDS. This is due to the:

- provision of de-identified person-level data according to a set of agreed national technical specifications
- application by the AIHW of nationally agreed rules and methods in the compilation and analysis of the data.

The AIHW and jurisdictions are now able to better identify, understand and address technical specification and data comparability issues. For example, a standard understanding in relation to deriving time measures has been developed, including the consistent development of care episodes. This means the data are much more useful in relation to understanding children's experience of the child protection system, and in shaping policies to improve outcomes for this group of disadvantaged children and their families. An added benefit is the ability of the AIHW to use CP NMDS data to populate child protection data requests directly.

The creation of a statistical linkage key (SLK) was an important part in the establishment of the CP NMDS. It will allow the AIHW to obtain a more accurate count of the number of children involved in the child protection system, both within jurisdictions and across Australia each year (that is, where the same child is represented in the data in more than 1 jurisdiction, this child would only be counted once). The SLK will also allow pathways of children in the child protection system to be followed. Because the same SLK is used for national data collections for the Youth Justice system, and homelessness services, it will also allow linkage to these other key national data sets and enable information on the outcomes of children and/or their use of health and other community services to be provided.

2.3 What is the scope and content of the data set?

The scope of each collection period includes all children (people aged less than 18) who were involved in any component of the child protection system in the preceding 2 financial years (for example, for the 2012–13 collection, data for 2011–12 and 2012–13 were provided).

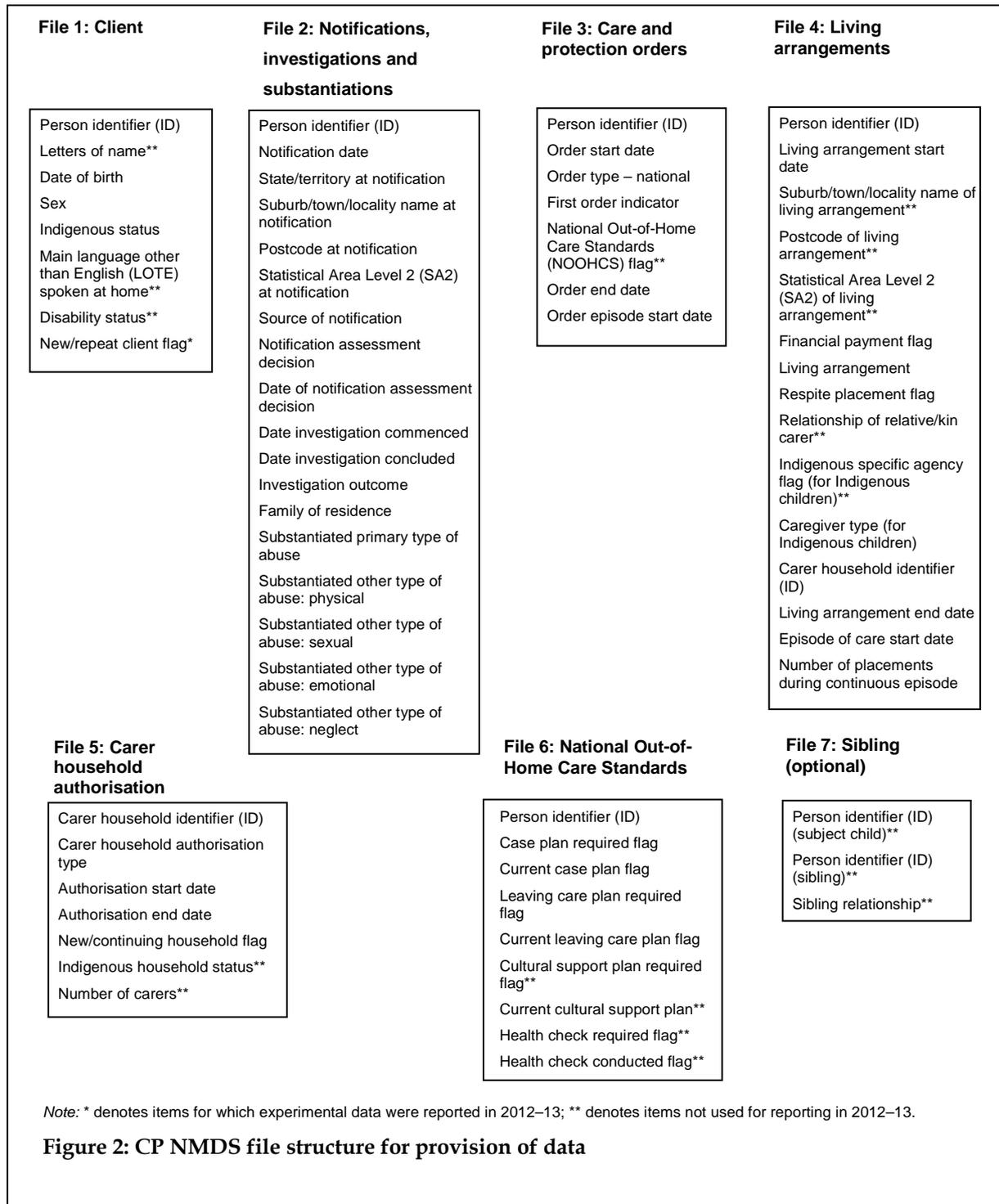
A data extraction model where all years of data included in the NMDS are re-extracted for each data collection would be ideal for building a longitudinal data set. However, several jurisdictions indicated that this approach would not be feasible for child protection, primarily due to system constraints. Instead, a 2-year extraction process is used for the CP NMDS. This approach will initially limit the longitudinal analyses that can be undertaken; however, it will allow a longitudinal data set to be built over time.

There are 7 files within the CP NMDS, all of which contain unit record level data (see Figure 2). The file data relate to:

1. client demographics
2. notifications, investigations and substantiations
3. care and protection orders
4. living arrangements for children under care, including children in funded out-of-home care and/or on orders
5. carer household authorisation
6. National Out-of-Home Care Standards (selected data measures from the CP NMDS)
7. siblings co-placed in out-of-home care.

All items in the collection specifications were agreed by the AIHW and a technical working group following the previous pilot collections (2010 and 2011) and the 2012 dress rehearsal. Full data collection specifications are available on request from the AIHW.

Intensive family support services data reported in *Child Protection Australia* and the RoGS were not included in the scope of the collection. This decision was made following previous work undertaken on developing a national collection on treatment and support services, which highlighted the complexities involved in collecting unit record data regarding intensive family support services. As with other child protection data, there are comparability issues that affect the data relating to intensive family support services.



3 From implementation onwards: key findings, challenges and next steps

In 2012–13, the first iteration of the CP NMDS was conducted; with unit record data used for reporting in *Child Protection Australia 2012–13* (AIHW 2014) by all jurisdictions except New South Wales and Queensland. It is expected that complete national reporting will be achieved for the 2013–14 collection, with the provision, analyses and reporting of unit record level data from all jurisdictions. The data quality statement for the 2012–13 CP NMDS can be found at <<http://meteor.aihw.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/583957>>.

This section includes information about a selection of key findings that were possible for the first time as a result of the new CP NMDS. It then describes some key challenges that were experienced during this first collection of unit record level data, and provides some information on planned next steps to further develop, expand and enhance the collection in future years.

3.1 What were the key new findings from the 2012–13 CP NMDS?

The introduction of the new CP NMDS data source allowed several new analyses to be included in *Child Protection Australia 2012–13* for the first time (see Box 1.1). This section includes data for a selection of these new analyses.

Box 1.1 New analyses included in *Child Protection Australia 2012–13*

The following new national analyses have been included for the first time in this report:

- unique counts of children receiving child protection services during the year, including the components of services received and breakdowns by Indigenous status and age. Children may receive a combination of child protection services and as such there are links and overlaps between the data for the notification, investigation and substantiation; care and protection order; and out-of-home care data collections. Previously, these were reported only as separate collections. For the first time, analyses relating to unique children across the 3 areas were included
- children in finalised investigations reported by outcome. Previously, this was reported for the number of finalised investigations (cases)
- the number of substantiations per child, indicating the proportion of children who were involved in multiple statutory child protection cases during the year
- co-occurring types of abuse and neglect, indicating the number of cases where more than 1 type of abuse or neglect was substantiated
- socioeconomic status, indicating the level of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage for children at the point of notification
- average day measures for children on orders or in out-of-home care and for carer households approved/authorised to provide funded out-of-home care placements. Average day measures are calculated by summing the number of days each person was subject to the same event during the year and dividing this total by the number of days in the financial year. This provides a view of the data that accounts for each day during the year.

Children receiving child protection services

In 2012–13, there were 135,139 children who received child protection services; a rate of 26.1 per 1,000 children aged 0–17 in the general population (Table 1.1). Of these:

- 91,370 were the subject of an investigation (17.6 per 1,000)
- 51,997 were on a care and protection order (10.0 per 1,000)
- 50,307 children were in out-of-home care (9.7 per 1,000).

Children who were the subject of an investigation represented a large component of the analysis of unique children receiving services. The rate of children who were the subject of substantiation following investigation was substantially lower than those who were the subject of investigation—a rate of 7.8 per 1,000 children who were the subject of substantiation in 2012–13 (AIHW 2014).

Table 1.1: Children receiving child protection services, by number and number per 1,000 children, 2012–13

	Number
Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification	91,370
Children on care and protection orders	51,997
Children in out-of-home care	50,307
Children receiving child protection services	135,139
	Number per 1,000 children
Children who were the subject of an investigation of a notification	17.6
Children on care and protection orders	10.0
Children in out-of-home care	9.7
Children receiving child protection services	26.1

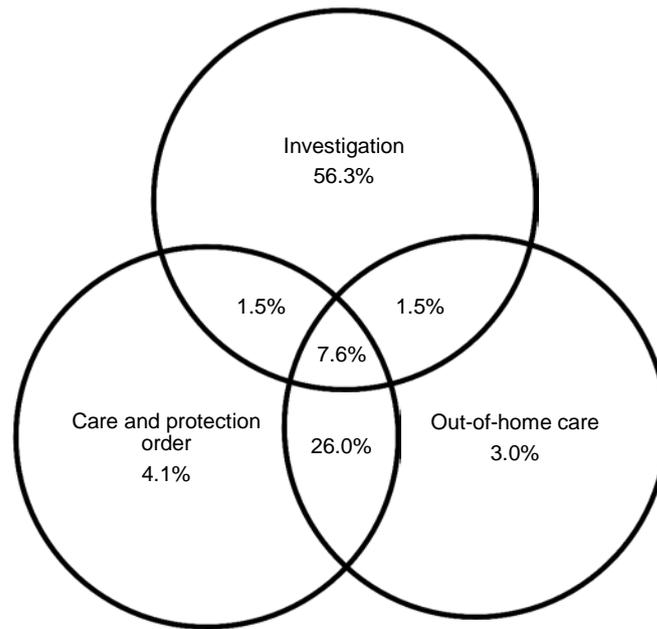
Note: 'Children receiving child protection services' is defined as 1 or more of the following occurring within the reporting period: an investigation of a notification, being on a care and protection order, or being in out-of-home care. It is not a total count of these 3 areas; it is a count of unique children across the 3 areas.

Source: AIHW 2014.

Children may receive a combination of child protection services and as such there are links and overlaps between the data for notification, investigation and substantiation; care and protection order; and out-of-home care data collections. For the first time, the overlap between the separate data collections has been analysed, drawing on unit record data from the majority of jurisdictions (and aggregate information specifically provided by NSW).

In 2012–13:

- Just over half (56%) of children receiving child protection services during 2012–13 were the subject of an investigation only.
- One-quarter (26%) of children were both on an order and in out-of-home care.
- Eight per cent of children were involved in all 3 components of the system (Figure 3).



Source: AIHW 2014.

Figure 3: Children receiving child protection services by components of service received, 2012-13

The CP NMDS will be used in future to provide more detailed analyses regarding the movement of children within the child protection system. Examples include:

- identifying children who are new clients and those returning to the child protection system
- investigating the flow of children through the system, such as the number of children who are the subject of a substantiation who are subsequently placed on care and protection orders and/or in out-of-home care.

Substantiations

In 2012-13, 40,571 children were the subjects of substantiations. Just over 1 in 5 children (21%) who were the subject of any substantiation during the year were the subject of more than 1 substantiation (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Number of substantiations per child, 2012-13

Number of substantiations	Total (%)
1	79.2
2	12.9
3	4.3
4+	3.6
Total	100.0
Children in substantiations	40,571

Note: The number of substantiations per child was not available for Queensland. Therefore, the total used for calculating the proportions excludes Queensland.

Source: AIHW 2014.

Type of abuse and neglect

Table 1.3 shows the co-occurrence of primary types of abuse or neglect with other types of abuse or neglect that were recorded for children. In 2012–13:

- Emotional abuse and neglect were the most common primary types of abuse or neglect (38% and 28%, respectively) and were also the most likely types to co-occur, with an average co-occurrence of around 27%.
- Where emotional abuse was the primary type of substantiated abuse, neglect co-occurred in almost one-third (32%) of cases.
- Where neglect was the primary type substantiated, emotional abuse co-occurred in just over one-fifth of cases.
- There were high proportions of co-occurrence of emotional abuse and neglect (37% and 26% respectively) in cases where physical abuse was the primary type substantiated.

Table 1.3: Co-occurrence of substantiated types of abuse and neglect, 2012–13

Primary type of abuse or neglect	Co-occurring type of abuse or neglect ^(a) (%)				Total
	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Emotional abuse	Neglect	
Physical abuse	..	1.2	37.3	26.3	9,063
Sexual abuse	2.3	..	21.3	11.9	6,358
Emotional abuse	14.3	1.5	..	32.0	17,052
Neglect	1.7	0.6	21.8	..	12,800
Average co-occurrence^(b)	7.8	1.1	26.7	26.5	..

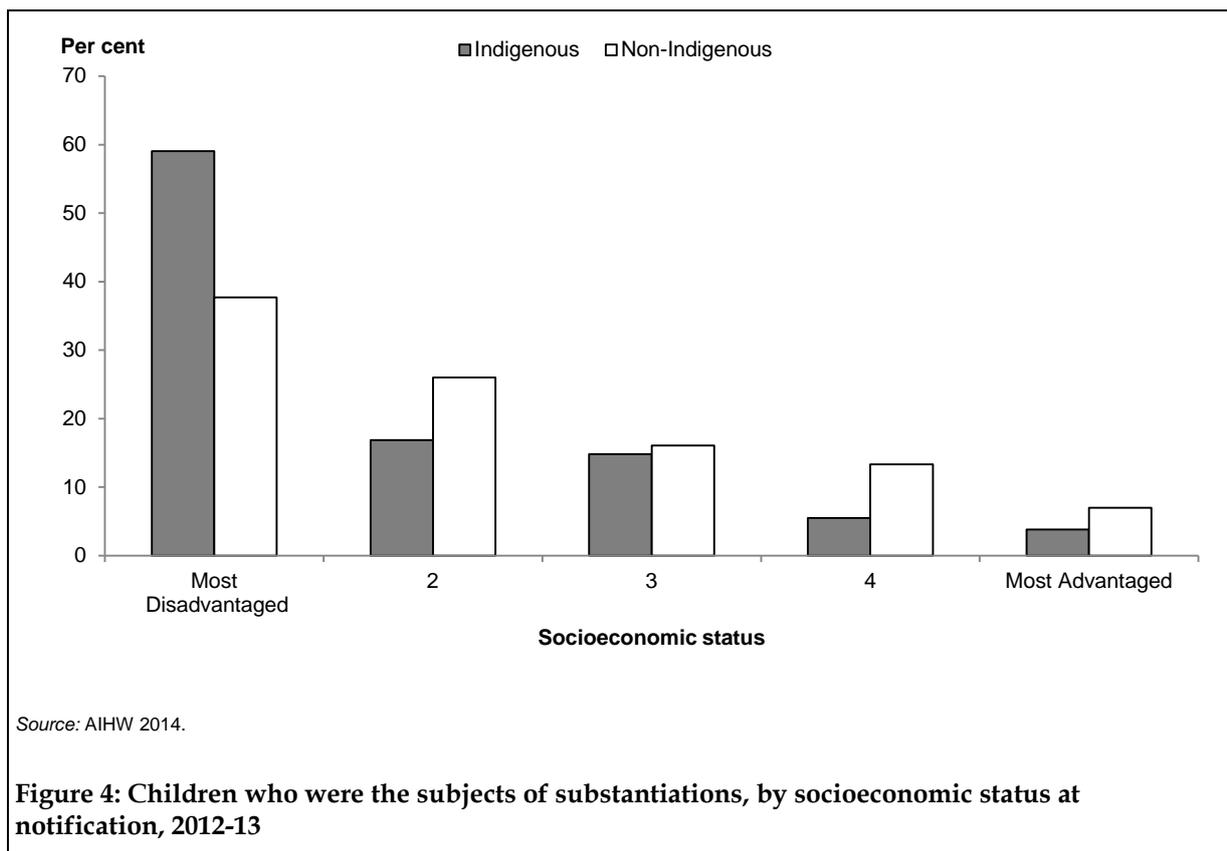
(a) Not all jurisdictions were able to provide data for all types of co-occurring abuse or neglect—some jurisdictions are only able to report primary and secondary types. Therefore the proportion of co-occurring abuse types may be understated.

(b) ‘Average co-occurrence’ is equal to the number of cases where the type of abuse or neglect of interest was identified as co-occurring with other types of abuse or neglect divided by the number of cases where the given type of abuse or neglect was not the primary type. For example, for the 36,210 cases where physical abuse was not the primary type of abuse recorded, physical abuse was also substantiated in 2,808 cases – an average co-occurrence of 7.8.

Source: AIHW 2014.

Socioeconomic status

Data for determining socioeconomic status (based on postcode at the time of the first notification that was substantiated) were available for around 35% of children in substantiations. Figure 4 shows that 42% of children were from the areas of the lowest socioeconomic status and Indigenous children were far more likely to be from areas of the lowest socioeconomic status—59% compared to 38% for non-Indigenous children.



Carer households

Average day measures are calculated by summing the number of days each person was subject to the same event during the year and dividing this total by the number of days in the financial year. This provides a view of the data that accounts for each day during the year.

On an average day in 2012–13, there were 23,354 households approved/authorised to provide funded out-of-home care placements. Most of these households were approved/authorised to provide foster or relative/kinship care (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: Overview of funded out-of-home carer households, on an average day during 2012–13

Authorisation type	Number	%
Foster carer	9,943	42.7
Relative/kinship carer	12,709	54.5
Both foster and relative/kinship carer	430	1.8
Respite-only carer	206	0.9
Long-term guardianship	18	0.1
Not stated	49	—
Total	23,354	100.0

Notes

1. 'Not stated' are excluded from the total when calculating proportions.
2. Data quality issues for some jurisdictions may impact on these results.

Source: AIHW 2014.

3.2 What were the challenges faced in the 2012–13 collection?

A key impediment to jurisdictions' ability to provide complete unit record data is that their extraction systems were not designed to record data as per the national reporting requirements. While many jurisdictions showed an increased ability to provide data for the majority of the files requested in the 2012–13 collection, others still experienced many challenges in extracting unit record data in the required format.

An ongoing impediment to the provision of complete unit record data is that national reporting requirements have expanded beyond previous aggregate national reporting requirements. As such, many of the new items included in the 2012–13 collection (that is, not previously required for national reporting) were either not available on the system or not of sufficient quality to be provided for reporting. Jurisdictional capacity to provide unit record data was also limited by system changes, departmental restructures, jurisdiction child protection inquiries and other competing priorities.

Differences in child protection policies and practice, including but not limited to, diversion policies and the availability of family support services across states and territories, continue to impact on the reported numbers. The implementation of the unit record collection has improved technical comparability; however, the underlying system differences need to be understood to accurately interpret the data.

All jurisdictions except Queensland provided unit record data as part of the 2012–13 collection. Queensland was unable to supply the CP NMDS data in the requested unit record file format for 2012–13 due to competing priorities. Queensland has commenced work on building the data extraction process for 2013–14 and indicated their ongoing support for the CP NMDS.

New South Wales also chose to report aggregate data rather than unit record level data to maintain consistency with information already available in the public domain (including local reporting and published data in the *Report on Government Services 2014* (SCRGSP 2014)). While slight variation was noted for other jurisdictions between previously published RoGS data and counts generated by the CP NMDS, the AIHW and jurisdictions were able to agree to the CP NMDS counts being used for national reporting in most cases (with a few noted exceptions).

While the unit record process was resource intensive for many jurisdictions, it is anticipated that future extractions will become more streamlined and the additional effort required by jurisdictions to report in the new format will be substantially reduced.

3.3 Where to from here?

The complete implementation of the national unit record collection is likely to take a number of years and initially may only include partial reporting against the NMDS by some jurisdictions. The AIHW will continue to work with jurisdictions to resolve data quality and comparability issues and to work towards more complete data provision and reporting for 2013–14. With the increased analytic potential of unit record data, a large range of analyses can be considered once unit record data of sufficient quality are available for all jurisdictions.

Jurisdictions have noted the potential for additional data to be provided in the future, particularly if there is a national requirement to collect and report the information. It is

hoped that the CP NMDS will be expanded over time to incorporate and/or link to other client information relating to issues such as poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, mental health status and service use, the use of drug and alcohol services, treatment and support services in the context of child protection, and Centrelink support. Further work is required to determine the scope, feasibility and resources required for this work, and to determine what level of long-term expansion of the CP NMDS is appropriate in the context of limited national resources to collect and report this information. A number of dedicated data development projects have been undertaken which work towards achieving the goal of enhancing the evidence base for child protection. For example, national data linkage work has been explored (or is underway) in relation to educational outcomes, disability services, and youth justice data. Additional consideration has been given to linking CP NMDS data with other relevant national collections such as disability and homelessness services.

In addition, data development work needs to be prioritised to ensure that data availability/quality improvements are progressed in targeted areas and within the resources of the national data providers. Clear policy direction and links to the National Framework are required before additional items can be prioritised and proposed for development/inclusion in the CP NMDS.

An aggregate collection specifically for data for the *Report on Government Services 2014* (SCRGSP 2014) was undertaken for all jurisdictions except South Australia and Tasmania (for which CP NMDS were used). It is intended that more jurisdictions will be in a position to use unit record level data for the 2015 RoGS and beyond. This would allow jurisdictions to provide 1 set of data that could be utilised for all national child protection reporting, thus reducing the burden experienced by many jurisdictions in 2012–13 (when having to provide both aggregate and NMDS data) and minimising the risk of variation in national child protection counts across reports. Work is required with jurisdictions to facilitate the provision of unit record data of suitable quality within the existing timeframes for the RoGS.

Population projections and back-casting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were recently revised based on the 2011 Census. Future national reporting will take into account the revised Indigenous population estimates – this will require some back-casting of trend data.

While recognising the value of the current CP NMDS, there is a substantial amount of work still to be undertaken. Ongoing prioritised development work is required to:

- ensure the provision of data that are comprehensive and of suitable quality for national reporting for the 2013–14 collection and beyond
- improve comparability
- expand the collection where necessary to provide additional policy-relevant information.

Future data development work will be focused on agreed national priorities, with clear policy direction and links to the National Framework.

Glossary

average day measure: Average day measures are calculated by summing the number of days each person was subject to the same event during the year and dividing this total by the number of days in the financial year. This provides a view of the data that accounts for each day during the year.

care and protection orders: Legal orders or arrangements that give child protection departments some responsibility for a child's welfare.

child: For the purpose of this collection, a person aged 0–17.

children receiving child protection services: Children who are the subjects of an investigation of a notification; on a care and protection order; and/or in out-of-home care.

children subject to orders: Children aged 0–17 on a care and protection order or other formal arrangement, or children aged 18 or under who were discharged from those care and protection orders/arrangements. See also **care and protection orders**.

emotional abuse: Any act by a person having the care of a child that results in the child suffering any kind of significant emotional deprivation or trauma. Children affected by exposure to family violence would also be included in this category.

foster care: A form of out-of-home care where the caregiver is authorised and reimbursed (or was offered but declined reimbursement) by the state/territory for the care of the child. (This category excludes relatives/kin who are reimbursed). There are varying degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers.

foster carer household: A private household containing 1 or more foster carers:

- who have undergone the relevant screening/selection and approval process
- who have received authorisation from the relevant department or agency to enable a child to be placed in their care
- for whom reimbursement is available from the state or territory government for expenses incurred in caring for the child. (There are varying degrees of reimbursement made to foster carers)
- who are part of an ongoing review process.

investigation: Investigations are the process whereby the relevant department obtains more detailed information about a child who is the subject of a notification received between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013. Departmental staff make an assessment about the harm or degree of harm to the child and their protective needs. An investigation includes sighting or interviewing the child where it is practical to do so.

neglect: Any serious acts or omissions by a person having the care of a child that, within the bounds of cultural tradition, constitute a failure to provide conditions that are essential for the healthy physical and emotional development of a child.

not stated: Where information was unknown or not recorded.

out-of-home care: Overnight care for children aged 0–17, where the state makes a financial payment or where a financial payment has been offered but has been declined by the carer.

physical abuse: Any non-accidental physical act inflicted upon a child by a person having the care of a child.

relative/kinship carer household: A private household containing 1 or more relative/kinship carers:

- who have undergone the relevant screening/selection and approval process
- who have received authorisation from the relevant department or agency to enable a relative/kinship child to be placed in their care
- for whom reimbursement is available from a government authority or non-government organisation for expenses incurred in caring for the child (there are varying degrees of reimbursement made to relative/kinship carers)
- who are part of an ongoing review process.

sexual abuse: Any act by a person, having the care of a child, that exposes the child to, or involves the child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards.

substantiations: Substantiations of notifications received during the current reporting year refer to child protection notifications made to relevant authorities between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013, which were investigated and the investigation was finalised by 31 August 2013, and where it was concluded that there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had been, was being, or was likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed. Substantiation does not necessarily require sufficient evidence for a successful prosecution and does not imply that treatment or case management was provided. Substantiations may also include cases where there is no suitable caregiver, such as children who have been abandoned or whose parents are deceased.

unit record level: A unit record level data collection involves the collection of (de-identified) information at the individual child and carer household level.

References

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2014. Child protection Australia: 2012–13. Child Welfare series no. 58. Cat. no. CWS 49. Canberra: AIHW.

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Further information and related publications

For more information about the CP NMDS or accessing data, please visit the AIHW website:

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/contact/>>

<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/data/>>.

The following AIHW publications relating to children, youth and families might also be of interest:

- AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2014. Child protection Australia: 2012–13. Child Welfare series no. 58. Cat. no. CWS 49. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2014. Indigenous child safety. Cat. no. IHW 127. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2014. Birthweight of babies born to Indigenous mothers. Cat. no. IHW 138. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2013. Australia's welfare 2013. Australia's welfare no. 11. Cat. no. AUS 174. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2012. A picture of Australia's children 2012. Cat. no. PHE 167. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2011. Educational outcomes of children under guardianship or custody orders: a pilot study, Stage 2. Child welfare series no. 49. Cat. no. CWS 37. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2011. Headline indicators for children's health, development and wellbeing, 2011. Cat. no. PHE 144. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2011. National outcome measures for early childhood development: development of indicator based reporting framework. Cat. no. PHE 134. Canberra: AIHW.
- AIHW 2011. Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2011. Cat. no. PHE 140. Canberra: AIHW.

Over the past few years, the AIHW, with dedicated national resources made available through the Australian Government, has worked with all jurisdictions to implement a new Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CP NMDS) for reporting on child protection. This working paper describes the development and implementation of the CP NMDS and highlights key new analyses able to be reported for the first time at the national level. It also outlines the need for ongoing development work.