

Senate Community Affairs References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Inquiry into Out of Home Care

Public Hearing, 16 April 2015, Canberra

Outcome Number: 2.1 Families and Communities

Question No: 1

Hansard page reference: 4

Senator Siewert asked:

What is the long-term data, if we have any, on the outcomes for children in open adoption versus the previously closed adoptions?

Answer:

Refer to Ms Justine Boland, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) response on Page 46 of the Proof Committee Hansard, Thursday 16 April 2015:

- ‘No that is certainly not something we have. Our adoptions collection, as I mentioned, is aggregate. I do not believe it even gets to the outcomes space at all, unfortunately’.
- ‘At the moment, our adoptions information is really just purely number of adoptions by different types and categories, so it really does not get to that space of outcomes because it is just numbers at times’.

As confirmed by AIHW, there is no national level data on the outcomes for children in open adoption. The Department of Social Services is working collaboratively with AIHW to undertake a feasibility study on the development of unit level records for children in open adoption and the linking of these records to the child protection database. These records will enable the provision of information on a child’s care history prior to adoption and determinations about if any of these children return to the child protection system. Unit level records may also support the tracking of outcomes for children in open adoption, in the long term.

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Outcome Number: 2.1 Families and Communities

Question No: 2

Hansard page reference: 6

Senator Siewert asked:

Is there any data being collected on the number of their parents who were care leavers?

Answer:

Refer to Ms Kristy Raithel and Ms Justine Boland, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare responses on Page 46 of the Proof Committee Hansard, Thursday 16 April 2015:

- ‘We do not have that in our data collection’.
- ‘Regarding our data collection, I mentioned that we are about to do the 18th report, and until last year it was only an aggregate collection, so we could not track children over time’.

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Question No: 3

Hansard page reference: 9

Senator Siewert asked:

Are you able to table your opening statement?

Answer:

Ms Barbara Bennett, Deputy Secretary Department of Social Services' opening statement is at **Attachment A**.

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ATTACHMENT A

DSS Opening Statement

The Department of Social Services welcomes the opportunity to speak at the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's Inquiry into Out-of-Home Care.

The Department would firstly like to acknowledge the important contribution non-parent carers make to our society, especially those who are the foster or relative/kinship carers of children and young people.

State and territory governments have statutory responsibility for issues relating to the welfare of children, including child protection and out-of-home care.

The Commonwealth Government is working in partnership with the state and territory governments and civil society to strengthen these systems, so we can only focus on support through programmes and payments and our contribution under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (the National Framework) – which we can give you more information later on.

The Commonwealth Government recognises that non-parent carers, whether they are a formal statutory out-of-home carer or caring under informal arrangements, need support and assistance to provide quality care to improve the life outcomes for the children and young people in their care.

The National Framework seeks to deliver a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time and provides a catalyst for national reform.

Under the National Framework the Commonwealth Government works with state and territory governments and the community sector in implementing a series of action plans. Under these plans, improving support to carers of children and young people in out-of-home care has been a key priority.

Some of the key achievements under the National Framework to date include:

- Development of Australia's first ever National Standards for out-of-home care to improve the quality of out-of-home care and promote a nationally consistent approach
- The appointment of the first National Children's Commissioner
- The Child Protection National Minimum Data Set that allows comparability of child protection data across jurisdictions and supports the monitoring of child protection services, programmes and policies.
- Development of 'transitioning from care' resources and support including increase to Transition to Independent Living Allowance (from \$1,000 to \$1,500) to assist young people leaving formal care arrangements with the costs associated with transitioning to independent living arrangements.

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- Child Aware approaches to address risk factors for child abuse and neglect; and
- Establishment of a National Research Agenda for Protecting Australia's Children.

In addition to its collaborative work with state territories and non-government organisations to support the safety and wellbeing of children, the Commonwealth through DSS provides financial and other supports to families including foster carer and relative/kinship carer families to assist with the costs of raising children. This information is set out in pages 9 to 14 of the Department's submission.

Noting that DSS is not the only Commonwealth agency that is involved in the National Framework, we work closely with Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Education, and the Attorney General's Department in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Some of the financial supports for families provided by the Commonwealth Government include: Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Benefit and Parenting Payment.

Children and young people in out of home care are eligible for Foster Child Health Care Card and Transition to Independent Living Allowance at the time of leaving care.

In addition to Commonwealth support, foster and kinship carers are eligible for allowances provided by state and territory governments.

The Commonwealth recognises the importance of early intervention and prevention and DSS has current programmes committed to a preventative and early intervention approach. These include:

- Children and Parenting Support that provides funding to services with an early intervention and prevention focus to children aged 0-12 and adults in a parenting role.
- Intensive Family Support Services to reduce child neglect and improve child wellbeing by increasing the capacity of parents and carers.
- A panel of research, practice and evaluation experts to support Families and Children service providers in the delivery of robust evidence-based practice, with a focus on prevention and early intervention

We are happy to respond to your questions.