

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE
PUBLIC HEARING, 16 APRIL 2015, CANBERRA
**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS: INQUIRY INTO
OUT OF HOME CARE**

Continuity of case worker indicator

Question: 1

Hansard page reference: 45

Hansard extract:

Senator BILYK: I have a question for the Productivity Commission first up. I think I read somewhere that 'continuity of caseworker' has not been defined. I think I read it when I was looking through the stats, but, like Senator Seselja, we have had lots of graphs and things sent to us. Does that come to mind?

Mr Garner: Continuity of caseworker across the child protection system?

Senator BILYK: Yes.

Mr Garner: I would like to take that on notice because that goes beyond the out-of-home care indicators. I am happy to take that on notice and come back to you.

Question 1: Response

'Continuity of case worker' is an indicator in the performance indicator framework for child protection services in the Report on Government Services. It is an indicator of governments' objective to ensure child protection services are delivered in an effective manner.

The turnover of workers is a frequent criticism of the quality of child protection services. Effective intervention requires a productive working relationship between the worker and the child and family.

This indicator is yet to be defined and is identified for development and reporting in the future.

Relative costs of various models of out-of-home care

Question: 2

Hansard page reference: 48

Hansard extract:

Senator SESELJA: I say this having not seen much of the Productivity Commission data or not having it to hand. Is there anything that you do, or in the datasets you have put together from the Productivity Commission's perspective, in terms of the cost relativities of the various models of out-of-home care, so looking at residential care, looking at kin care, looking at foster care?

Mr Garner: Yes, there is. We have an indicator which identifies the total amount of expenditure on out-of-home care divided by the number of children in out-of-home care. So it is an expenditure during the year divided by the number of children on 30 June. We have that as an aggregate, and we also have that for residential out-of-home care and for non-residential out-of-home care. But the datasets for the residential and non-residential are not as complete, because some states are not able to differentiate between the two in their accounting systems.

Senator SESELJA: But, with what you have, does it show a sharp disparity in the cost of those two, the non-residential versus the residential?

Mr Garner: I can check the numbers quickly now or take that on notice for you.

Senator SESELJA: Could you take it on notice, because this is what I am interested to get to the bottom of. We have heard that often it is very difficult to get enough foster carers, yet you would think that, even with support for foster carers, it is not going to be anywhere near the same sort of cost as other models of residential care that we have been hearing about, so I would be interested to see if the data actually backs that up.

Mr Garner: We are happy to provide that to you.

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Question 2: Response

‘Total expenditure on children in residential and non-residential out-of-home care per child in residential and non-residential out-of-home care’ is an indicator in the child protection services chapter in the Report on Government Services. It is a proxy indicator of governments’ objective to maximise the benefit to the community through the efficient use of public resources. It measures expenditure in a financial year divided by the number of children in out-of-home care on 30 June of that same year.

The indicator reports residential and non-residential care separately. Residential care includes facilities where placement is in a residential building with paid staff. Non-residential care includes family group homes and other types of home based care, including foster care, relative/kinship care and independent living.

This indicator is regarded as comparable (subject to caveats) within some jurisdictions over time, but is not comparable across jurisdictions. This indicator is also incomplete (some jurisdictions do not report all data) for the most recent reporting period (2013-14).

The measures that support this indicator are proxies and need to be interpreted with care as they do not represent a measure of unit costs. Expenditure over a year per child in care at 30 June overstates the cost per child because significantly more children are in care during a year than at a point in time. In addition, the indicator does not reflect the length of time that a child spends in care.

Data for all out-of-home care expenditure in a year per child in out-of-home care at 30 June are provided for all jurisdictions for ten years up to 2013-14.

- For 2013-14 the data show that costs per child in all out-of-home care services varied between \$43 909 (NSW) and \$91 058 (NT).

These data are disaggregated for residential out-of-home care and non-residential out-of-home care but are only available for Victoria, WA, SA and ACT for ten years up to 2013-14, and for Tasmania since 2008-09.

- For 2013-14, these data show that the cost of **residential** out-of-home care per child in residential out-of-home care services varied between \$235 371 (SA) and \$640 244 (WA).
- For 2013-14 the data show that the cost of **non-residential** out-of-home care per child in non-residential out-of-home care services varied between \$26 502 (Tasmania) and \$41 102 (ACT).

Despite the significant differences across jurisdictions, the data show that costs of residential out-of-home care per child are considerably greater than costs of non-residential out-of-home care per child.¹

¹ Data source is table 15A.3 in the 2015 Report on Government Services: <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/recurring/report-on-government-services/2015/community-services/child-protection>