

MEDIA RELEASE

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MEDIA RELEASE: OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 29 NOVEMBER 2024

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) Annual Report 2023-24 was tabled in Parliament yesterday. The report reflects the work undertaken by the OCC during the past financial year and analysis of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) data on the experiences of vulnerable children including those involved in the youth justice and/or child protection systems.

In 2023-24, the OCC observed the significant impact that domestic and family violence has on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families. "I am deeply concerned about the impact of domestic and family violence on children and young people. DCF data indicated domestic and family violence was a contributing factor in at least 66% of child protection notifications where harm was substantiated. More must be done to support vulnerable children who are exposed to the real and harmful impact of domestic and family violence" said Children's Commissioner Shahleena Musk.

Of significant concern to the OCC is the limited and timely provision of data during this reporting period on the experiences of, and outcomes for, Aboriginal children, young people, and their families. "The tracking and reporting on the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) in the NT is inadequate. Embedding all five elements of the ATSICPP is key to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care and ensuring that children who are in care remain connected to their family, culture and community" said Children's Commissioner Shahleena Musk.

"The ongoing overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the NT's child protection and youth justice system is unacceptable. Despite a small decrease in the number of children in care overall, we continue to see the gap between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal children growing wider. There continues to be a significant investment in the expensive purchased home based care model over the placement of children with kin, significant others or in foster care" said Commissioner Musk.

"In this reporting period, purchased home based care received \$34.9 million in funding compared to kinship care services that received \$4.1 million. This is in conflict with the NT Government's commitments under Safe and Supported – National Framework for protecting Australia's children and undermines the NT's obligations to implement all elements of the ATSICPP" said Commissioner Musk.



Protecting the best interests of Territory children

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During 2023-24, 56% of children in care aged 15-17 did not have a current care plan. Children that are removed and taken into care must receive adequate support and care planning to ensure they remain connected to their culture and community. This is essential in achieving positive outcomes for children when they prepare to leave care. “Adequate and individualised care planning is critical for vulnerable children involved in the child protection system – both when they are in care and when they leave the system” said Commissioner Musk.

The report also highlights findings of the OCC’s community engagement and consultation work with children across the NT. In a recent project that focused on understanding children and young people’s experiences of racism, 80% of the children and young people who participated had seen or experienced racism. “Racism detrimentally impacts the health and wellbeing of children. We heard through our consultations that racism impacts on the sense of safety, belonging and connection that children experience in their communities,” said Commissioner Musk.

Other key 2023-24 data highlights include:

- The OCC was contacted on 501 occasions about concerns relating to children and young people
- 318 issues were raised by children and young people in detention
- The OCC conducted 18 own initiatives
- The NT notifies child protection authorities of alleged harm at 6 times the rate of the national average
- 886 children in care in the NT; this is a minor reduction from the previous year
- 89% of children in care are Aboriginal
- 53% of children in care were identified as living with disability
- Aboriginal children are in care 12.1 times the rate of non-Aboriginal children in the NT
- The use of youth justice cautioning and diversion has declined significantly in the NT for children aged 12-17 with a 49% reduction occurring between 2021-23.

ENDS

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