

ANNUAL REPORT 2023–2024

Queensland Family and
Child Commission



About this report

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is a statutory body of the Queensland Government. Its purpose is to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families. This annual report describes the progress made in 2023–2024 toward achieving our strategic objectives. These objectives are published in the *QFCC Strategic Plan 2022–26*. It sets out our financial position and compliance with legislative requirements. Production costs of this report have been minimised. An electronic copy is available at www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/annual-report.

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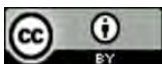
Acknowledgement

The QFCC acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians across the lands, seas and skies on which we walk, live and work. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, strengths and knowledge. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Queensland and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Queensland
Family & Child
Commission



Telephone: 07 3900 6000
Reference: TF24/671 – D24/958

The Honourable Yvette D'Ath MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

Via email: attorney@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Attorney-General

I am pleased to submit for presentation to the Parliament the Annual Report 2023–2024 and financial statements for the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

This report covers a period of significant work for the Commission.

I certify that this Annual Report complies with:

- the prescribed requirements of the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* and the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*;
- section 40 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*; and
- the requirements set out in the *Annual report requirements for Queensland Government agencies 2023–2024*.

A checklist outlining compliance with the annual report requirements is provided at Appendix B of this report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Twyford".

Luke Twyford
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

30 August 2024

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Commissioners' introduction

Commissioner Luke Twyford

This has been a significantly productive year for the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). We have worked to influence change in the child and family wellbeing systems so that every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld. This year, we have made a concerted effort to achieve this vision by investing in our sector partnerships and enhancing our community engagement. Commissioner Natalie Lewis and I travelled extensively throughout the year to gain a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing children, families, communities, frontline workers and governments. This has ensured our advice remains contemporary and is based on evidence and the lived experiences of Queenslanders.

From overseeing the Residential Care Review, investigating Queensland's watch house system and Blue Card schemes, researching the occurrence of paediatric sepsis, to hosting our inaugural Youth Summit, and via our reports and projects, including the *First Nations Children's Report, Growing Up in Queensland*, our section 40 report, and the digitisation of our monitoring efforts, each initiative has added value to our core mission to influence positive change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and families.

This year marks my third year as the Principal Commissioner, bringing the sobering reality of the 1000th child death crossing my desk. This milestone serves as a stark reminder of the importance of our Child Death Register and its role in informing government's work and policies that can prevent the tragic loss of life. In this regard, hosting the Child Death Review Board is one of the key pillars of our work. As Board Chair, I have had privilege of welcoming four new members and leading the development of recommendations that boldly engage with deep and complex social issues that impact families known to the child protection system.

We are a Commission that recognises that transparency, partnerships and amplification are critical principles that must underpin our approach. We believe in transparency as a tool for accountability and improvement. Our published *Forward Oversight Workplan* and our *Safer pathways through childhood action plan* enable the sector and community to understand our concerns and our planned actions. Our engagement on our upcoming work shapes system performance ahead of our reviews and ensures the Commission's work is meaningful.

Throughout 2023–2024 our partnerships with government agencies, sector organisations and community stakeholders have continued to grow. They have been vital in driving positive change and ensuring that our initiatives have a lasting impact. In 2024, we entered new partnerships with the Daniel Morcombe Foundation, Hymba Yumba School, Project Paradigm, PeakCare, the Australian Institute of Play, Children's Health Queensland (CHQ), Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and CREATE Foundation. Our strategic partnerships have enabled us to deliver significant collective impact for the benefit of Queensland children and families.

Amplification is another key aspect of our work. We strive not only to conduct our own reviews but also to amplify the lived experiences and voices that are often unheard or marginalised.

This year, we delivered Australia's first survey of parents engaged in child protection. We also hosted our first Queensland Youth Summit, and our expanded Youth Advocate Network engaged in more consultation with government.

In terms of our advice, we made 25 submissions to Queensland Parliamentary Committees and inquiries and a further seven submissions to national and international inquiries. We are proud of our submissions and the quality of advice we give to government. Our pursuit of evidence-based policies, programs and practices is driven by our core belief that we can do more to protect Queensland's children and families.

I also must acknowledge Commissioner Lewis. The Commission is unique in having two Statutory Officers within one organisation, both reporting to the Minister. This unique dynamic gives our Commission the strength of diverse perspectives, expertise and energy in our work.

I also acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the employees of the Commission. Their commitment to our vision has been instrumental in making this year a remarkably impactful one.



Luke Twyford

Principal Commissioner

Commissioner Natalie Lewis

As Commissioner, I have a responsibility for keeping our children's rights and best interests at the forefront of government policy to ensure our children are safe and connected to their culture and kin.

My work, and that of the First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team who report to me, uses a rights-based approach to raise awareness of issues that affect the lives of young Queenslanders. I am committed to providing oversight of the systemic and structural issues disproportionately affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland. Awareness, advocacy, and accountability is our core business.

A legislated function of the Commission is to monitor progress against state and national goals. While there have been significant reforms and investment, the recent *Productivity Commission Report on Closing the Gap* report identified there is no clear mechanism for accountability, or capacity to examine the impact of those reforms, particularly at a regional and local level. To address this, we developed and continued to build on the Principle Focus program of work. In March 2024, we publicly launched the Principle Focus dashboard, monitoring over-representation of First Nations children in Queensland's child protection system, statewide and regionally. This data will be updated quarterly. I am confident this work will allow us to continuously analyse over-representation and promote transparency and accountability about this critical systems issue.

Our report *A thematic analysis of provisionally approved kinship carers who receive a subsequent blue card negative notice* was tabled in October 2023. This was an examination of the issues that were consistently raised by service providers and departmental officers across the state. The resulting recommendations sought to remedy a longstanding systemic issue that has harmed both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their kin.

In August 2023, we launched the inaugural *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*. This annual report monitors Queensland's progress in upholding child rights. This report included a spotlight on the youth justice system. The edition due for release in 2024 spotlights refugee and asylum-seeker children, including unaccompanied minors. This work is being completed through a collaboration with Multicultural Australia.

We also launched our inaugural *First Nations Children's Report* and plan to expand this to a broader platform to showcase strength-based First Nations' stories and projects.

We have continued with our Young, Black & Proud Scholarships in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS). To date, we have awarded 248 scholarships.

In early 2024, we were engaged by the Department of Education (DoE) to conduct a statewide consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in early childhood, primary and secondary education, and vocational training, to inform the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative body to DoE. To complete that work, we partnered with 19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and engaged over 1200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

We interviewed young people who have experienced a suspension or exclusion and provided those findings back to DoE to support efforts to reduce the over-representation of First Nations children, children with a disability, and children in out-of-home care (OOHC).

In 2024, our partnership with Hymba Yumba, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community school, supports an evaluation of its year 13 pilot. This project allows students to continue the important relational and cultural connections nurtured during their schooling through the transition from school to the next phase of work, training or further education.

It is deeply disappointing that, despite a commitment by all state governments to establish dedicated, independent, appropriately empowered and resourced Commissioners for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and despite the Commission's supporting recommendation, this simple, yet critical addition to Queensland's statutory bodies has still not materialised. Meanwhile, I acknowledge the present administrative arrangement, granting the Commissioner its own dedicated team. This provides some flexibility and autonomy to construct an independent program of work for rights-based, equity-focused advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.



Natalie Lewis

Commissioner

A snapshot of 2023–2024

Fourteen oversight reviews were completed and provided significant insight into statutory child protection systems and opportunities to influence systemic change, including:

- drivers of disproportionality and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the statutory child protection system¹
- factors contributing to young people being held longer in Queensland watch houses²
- opportunities for practice improvements that can lead to better identification of sepsis in children³
- insights into systemic barriers for kinship carers and opportunities for systemic change⁴
- the impact of parental methamphetamine use on children.⁵

Twenty formal recommendations to government were made to improve systems for children, young people and their families.

Thirty-two formal submissions were made to state, federal and international reviews and inquiries, including:

- Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland
- *Putting Queensland Kids First* plan
- *Victims' Commissioner and Sexual Violence Review Board Bill 2024*
- *Community Safety Bill 2024*.

We were featured in 2385 media reports, a 293 per cent increase from the previous year.

The details of **422 child deaths were recorded in the Child Death Register**. This register is an important resource as the data held informs policies, practices and interventions aimed at preventing future child deaths.

The voices of over 4600 Queenslanders were collected through a range of engagement and advocacy activities, including:

- **3154 Queenslanders** shared their perspectives about children and parenting.⁶
- Over **1200 First Nations participants** had their say on the establishment of a Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education, Education and Training Consultative Body.
- **324 parents and families** with a lived experience of a child involved with the protection system shared their experiences on child protection processes.⁷
- **50 young Queenslanders** were engaged as casual employees, as part of our Youth Advocate Network.

- **66 children and young people** were interviewed regarding their lived experiences of the youth justice system.⁸
- **38 young people** raised their voices at the QFCC Youth Summit.⁹
- **11 young people with a lived experience of residential care** shared their ideas about the improvements needed for the residential care system and engaged in solutions-mapping discussions.¹⁰

The Board reviewed **70 deaths** of children known to the child protection system.

More than **150 professionals** participated in the Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention conference we hosted.

Ten reports and insights papers were published, exploring a range of issues impacting children, young people and families, including:

- young people who are absent from care placements¹¹
- how Queensland upholds children's rights¹²
- actions required for the successful implementation of the Queensland Government's *Residential Care Roadmap*.¹³

Commissioners and staff **travelled thousands of kilometres** to present at conferences, appear at hearings and inquiries, meet with stakeholders and ensure the voices of children, young people and families across the whole of Queensland were heard. We visited:

- Far North Queensland, including Cairns, Northern Peninsula and Zenadth Kes communities
- North Queensland, including Mount Isa
- Central Queensland, including Emerald, Longreach and Rockhampton
- Darling Downs South West, including Cherbourg, Roma and Kingaroy
- North Coast, including Monto and Sunshine Coast
- Interstate, including Darwin, Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart and Adelaide.

Thirteen requests for information were made under section 35 of our legislation.

We partnered with more than 13 government agencies, non-government organisations and community stakeholders, and provided more than \$980,000 to support, connect and collaborate with organisations to advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children, including:

- \$166,000 to Children's Rights Queensland (CRQ) to deliver a public campaign promoting children's rights, including Children's Week, designed to celebrate the rights of Queensland children and celebrate their talents, skills and abilities
- \$150,000 to deliver the Young, Black & Proud Scholarships in partnership with ATSICHS to support and celebrate the talents and strengths of young First Nations people who exhibit outstanding promise but may lack the support and resources to reach their full potential

- \$121,000 to the Daniel Morcombe Foundation for the e-kidna Group to develop and promote advocacy and educational content
- \$96,000 to Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good (DIYDG) for the Growing Our Way initiative.

About us

The QFCC is a statutory body established by the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (the Act) to:

- promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people
- promote and advocate for the responsibility of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people
- improve the child protection system.

The Commission has several statutory functions including:


- providing oversight of the child protection system and analysing and evaluating, at a systemic level, policies and practices relevant to the child protection system and the performance of relevant agencies in delivering services
- giving expert advice to relevant agencies about laws, policies, practices and services and to promote and advocate for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, particularly children in need of protection or in the youth justice system
- assisting relevant agencies to evaluate the efficacy of their programs and identify the most effective service models
- informing and educating the community about how the child protection system operates
- developing and coordinating a multidisciplinary research program to inform policies and practices, in consultation with stakeholders and relevant agencies.

The Commission is responsible for maintaining the Child Death Register, which includes the collection, analysis and publication of information pertaining to registered child deaths in Queensland. The purpose of this work is to help prevent future deaths and serious injuries, and to work with researchers and other agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies.

We also host the Board, which conducts systemic reviews following the death of a child known to the child protection system. These reviews identify opportunities to improve the child protection system and prevent future deaths.

To fulfill these functions the Commission:

- collects, monitors, analyses and reports on the performance of government systems
- conducts system reviews and evaluations
- publishes findings and recommendations

- 
- monitors progress against government strategies and past recommendations
 - publicly reports on issues and presents facts to the community, the media and the Parliament
 - reports to the responsible Minister on our work and findings
 - makes submissions to decision-making bodies promoting evidence and amplifying lived experiences.

We have a track record of drawing attention to issues regarding child wellbeing; raising community awareness; and encouraging positive action by governments, service providers and others. Our strategies and activities support the government's 'Backing our frontline services' objective to deliver world-class services in key areas that affect children and their families.

Our framework

Family and Child Commission Act 2014

The Commission is a statutory body established by *the Family and Child Commission Act 2014* to:

- promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people
- promote and advocate for the responsibility of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people
- improve the child protection system.

Vision

Every Queensland child is loved, respected and has their rights upheld.

Purpose

Our purpose is to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland’s children and their families.

Values

- Respectful and inclusive
- Collaborative
- Objective and courageous
- Excellence

Strategic objectives

1. Ensure systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and families.
2. Raise awareness and advocate for children and their families.
3. Empower children and their families to influence decisions that affect their lives.
4. Support, connect and collaborate with organisations that advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children.
5. Build our capacity, capability and culture to achieve our vision.

Explicit commitments

We have made explicit commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and advancing the rights of children.

2023–2027 Oversight Framework

Articulates the model, principles and methodologies that apply to how the QFCC delivers impactful reviews, audits and evaluations that influence positive change.

Safer pathways through childhood 2022–2027

Provides a roadmap for our child death prevention activities over the next five years and details how we will use our data and expertise on child deaths to uphold all children’s rights to a full life and health equity.

Child and Youth Participation Framework

Outlines how we give children and young people genuine opportunities to participate in decision making, to give full effect to the realisation of their rights, including connecting with them, supporting them in sharing their views, amplifying what they tell us, and influencing decision makers with their ideas.

Opportunities

- Extend our capability and influence to provide stronger oversight over the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people.
- Expand engagement with young Queenslanders from all backgrounds and geographical locations to further inform decisions impacting their lives.
- Reaffirm the role and responsibilities of family, community, government and service providers in protecting children’s rights.
- Strengthen the QFCC’s role as a source of advice and expertise on issues impacting the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Engage with non-government service providers to enhance our oversight of the child and family support system.

Risks

- An inability to source high-quality data outcomes reduces our capacity to effectively monitor the impact the child and family support system is having. This can restrict our ability to drive improvements and build a culture of accountability.
- Failure to include the voices of young Queenslanders in our decisions will diminish our ability to influence change.
- Ineffective partnering with stakeholders will limit opportunities to facilitate sustainable system change.

Our context

We are a Commission focussed on Queensland's most precious resources – its children and families. Currently, there are more than 5.5 million people living in Queensland¹⁴ and the state recorded a population growth rate of 2.6 per cent in the 12-months to 31 December 2023.¹⁵ There are 1.5 million families living in Queensland, including 563,326 families that are two-parent families and 230,033 that are single parent families. Approximately 23 per cent of all Queenslanders are born overseas.¹⁶

Approximately 30 per cent of Queenslanders are under the age of 25, and eight per cent identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁷ In the past 12-months, the number of Queensland children and young people aged 0–24 years has increased two per cent to around 1.7 million,¹⁸ of which:

- 80 per cent have a grownup who listens to them and helps when they are upset and 72 per cent do fun things with their family¹⁹
- 229,300 have a disability²⁰ and 72,500 have a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) support plan²¹
- 172,000 will require an ambulance²²
- 150,000 access Medicare-funded psychological services²³
- 15,000 start school with a developmental delay or vulnerability²⁴
- 10,000 are educated via home education²⁵
- 265,000 will attend school less than 90 per cent of the time²⁶
- 43,000 are suspended or excluded from school²⁷
- 42,000 live in public or social housing and 20,000 were on the public housing register²⁸
- 86,000 are subject to a report to the child safety system²⁹
- 7000 are found to have been neglected, harmed or in need of protection³⁰
- 13,000 are in state care³¹
- 3300 were convicted in a Queensland court.³²

Priority populations

Whilst we bring a broad lens to our work, we recognise that it will have the greatest impact by focussing on those families and children who are most in need, and most greatly impacted by government service delivery. The experiences of four groups are prioritised in our work.

1. **Families exposed to the child protection system:** In Queensland, the child protection and family support system responds to concerns about the care and protection of children who have been, or are at risk of, being abused, neglected or exploited by their family. The child protection and family support system consist of both secondary and statutory approaches,

which are provided based on the level of need, risk and harm. Children and their families may receive support services to keep children safe or be subject to investigations.

2. **Children in OOHC and their carers:** Some children are unable to live safely at home as they may be at risk of being abused or neglected. In these cases, the state will seek a court order that removes the child from their parents and gives the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS) responsibility for a child's care and welfare. Subsequently, these children become subject to a formalised government system designed to meet their safety, wellbeing and development needs. Foster and kinship carers are the backbone of the OOHC system and have an integral role in providing safe and caring homes for children. Ensuring the capacity, capability and retention of carers is a critical part of the system and we include foster care families as a priority cohort within the definition of families exposed to the child protection system.
3. **Families exposed to the youth justice system:** The youth justice system is designed to uphold and protect community safety by responding to the behaviours in young people that are anti-social and criminal. The youth justice system spans from early intervention to detention. The *Youth Justice Act 1992* recognises the importance of the provision of services designed to rehabilitate and reintegrate children and young people who commit offences. Young people exposed to the youth justice system are too often treated independently, yet we know that unaddressed, significant family adversity remains a precursor to youth justice exposure. Consequently, in our work we consider the families that are exposed to the youth justice system.
4. **First Nations families:** We recognise the rich and resilient cultures that continue to sustain and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We respect the right to self-determination and the critical importance of continuing connection to kin, Country and culture in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also recognise the significant disparities and challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. First Nations children and families continue to be disproportionately represented in statutory child protection and youth justice systems in Queensland and across Australia. We are committed to identifying and highlighting the dynamics and drivers of this over-representation to help communicate and address the causes and situational influences.

The selection of these four priority populations does not mean we do not consider and bring focus to other groups in our community. Other families and children that are likely to be considered in the performance of our oversight work includes:

1. parents or children with a disability
2. parents or children experiencing poor mental health
3. parents or children experience housing instability or homelessness
4. parents or children with reduced access to services (including those living in rural and remote areas)
5. parents or children with substance addiction.

Our structure

Throughout 2023–2024 the structure of the organisation reflected the outcomes of the 2022 functional alignment review which led to the establishment of three internal divisions.

The Operations division included:

- **System Reviews** – Delivers high-impact assessments that bring together evidence, the experiences of children and families and the insights of stakeholders to identify and drive system accountability and positive change.
- **Analysis, Insights and Reporting** – Clearly communicates system performance outcomes by using visual, verbal and written storytelling techniques, and leads the collection, collation and analysis of evidence that enables external decision-making and strengthens public understanding.
- **Media and Communication** – Designs and executes media and communications materials that promotes the Commission, its programs and advocacy positions, and provides an agile response to emerging issues that enable us to be part of, and influential in, public discussion. Also creates engaging public-facing digital content that connects the community and specific stakeholders in our work.

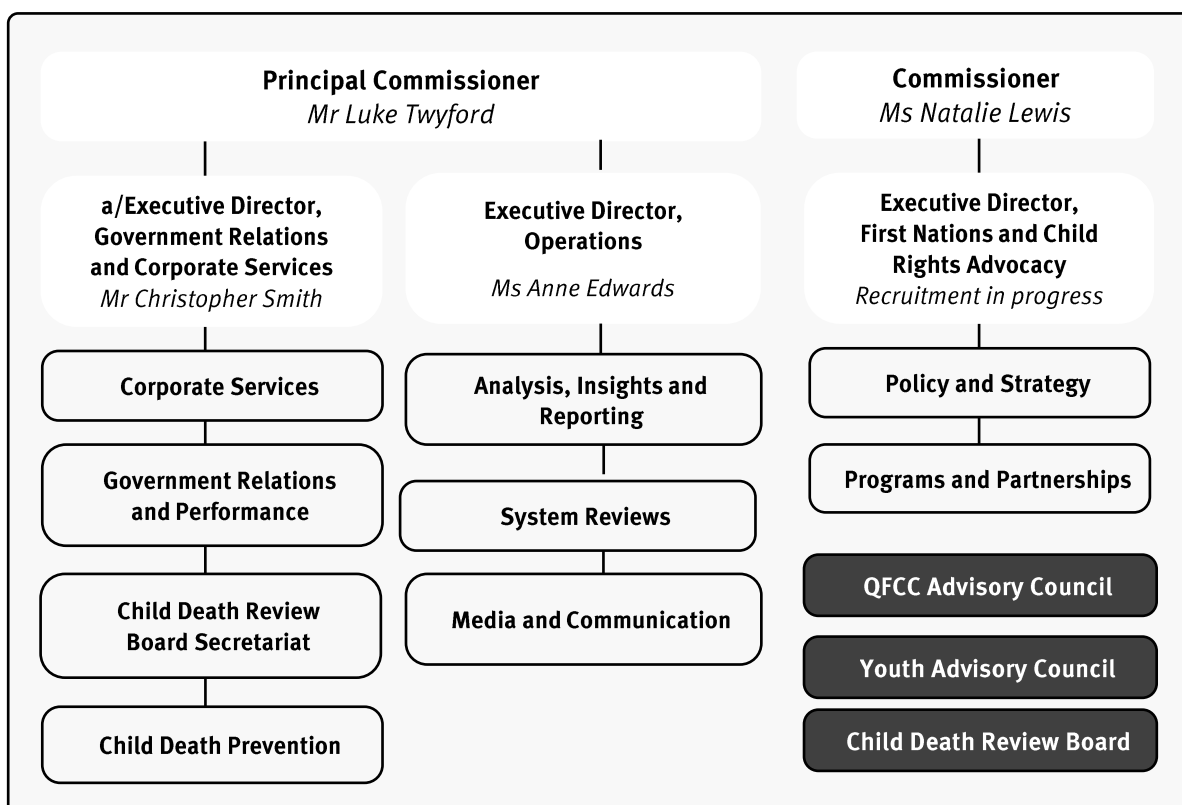
The Government Relations and Corporate Services division included:

- **Corporate Services** – Responsible for the Commission’s governance, people and finance systems and ensuring decision-making processes are robust and comply with state and Commonwealth laws.
- **Government Relations and Performance** – Leads the Commission’s Parliamentary and cross-government engagement, ensuring our work is impactful and targeted and that we are aware of, and have opportunity to be involved in, emerging issues, including government initiatives, reforms and legislation.
- **Child Death Review Board Secretariat** – Ensures the integrity of Board operations and leads the systemic process of reviewing government service delivery to children who have died whilst known to the child protection system to identify system improvements and supports the Board to make impactful recommendations.
- **Child Death Prevention** – Maintains a comprehensive and contemporary Child Death Register through which we actively facilitate research and promote information to support policy and legislation development that prevents further child deaths.

The First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy division reported to Commissioner Lewis and included:

- **Policy and Strategy** – Provides high quality strategic advice and alignment to broad government priorities and commitments to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and to advocate for the promotion and protection of the rights of Queensland children.

- **Programs and Partnerships** – Develops and delivers programs and initiatives and build strategic partnerships that influence outcomes for Queensland children, including building the capacity, capability and integrity of the Commission’s delivery against its explicit commitments to child rights and First Nations children and their families.



Executive team

Luke Twyford

Principal Commissioner

Luke was appointed as Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner of the QFCC in December 2021. Luke’s parents fostered a number of children throughout his childhood, with his own lived experience and those of his foster brothers and sisters profoundly shaping the perspectives and passion he brings to his work. Luke’s career spans more than 20 years across Commonwealth, New South Wales and Northern Territory governments in the areas of reform, research, integrity, audit and governance. He has led critical reform of child protection and youth justice systems and their legal frameworks and has extensive experience monitoring the performance of the systems designed to keep children safe.

Natalie Lewis

Commissioner

Natalie Lewis is a Gamilaraay woman and the Commissioner of the QFCC. Natalie is committed to progressing a transformational reform agenda to strengthen Queensland's focus on children's rights. Her passion for children's rights is inspired by the experiences of children and young people disadvantaged by the systems designed to protect them, especially those in statutory child and youth justice systems.

Natalie has dedicated her career to improving life outcomes for First Nations peoples across Australia and is deeply committed to addressing the systemic and structural issues that disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. She has led significant national reform across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection and family services sectors, playing an instrumental role in the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) in Australian child protection legislation. She is a strong advocate for protecting the right of First Nations people to exercise self-determination and to remain meaningfully connected to kin, culture and Country.

Natalie has held senior executive roles in the Queensland Government, the advocacy sector and has been appointed to numerous national boards and councils.

Christopher Smith

a/Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services

In September 2023, we welcomed Christopher Smith from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) into the role of acting Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services. Chris has extensive senior leadership and management experience, having worked over nine years in Director roles across a range of areas. Chris has previously worked at the Department of Environment and Science, and the University of Southern Queensland.

Anne Edwards

Executive Director, Operations

Anne Edwards was appointed to the role of Executive Director, Operations in October 2023. Anne has extensive experience leading reform, including establishing the First Nations Justice Office within Queensland's Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG), where she led efforts to achieve the justice targets outlined in the National Agreement and establishing the Justice Policy Partnership in Queensland. Anne performed a central role in the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry and has experience as a senior leader at the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council.

Executive Director, First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy

In September 2023, the Commission farewellled Penny Creamer, Executive Director, First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy, and in 2024 an open merit-based recruitment process was undertaken. This recruitment was completed in 2023–2024, with a new appointment commencing July 2024.

EXPLICIT COMMITMENTS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families and advancing child rights

As part of the *QFCC Strategic Plan 2022–2026*, we made explicit commitments to First Nations children and their families and advancing the rights of children. This commitment is embedded across all QFCC strategic objectives. To bring this commitment to life, Commissioner Lewis leads a First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team, providing dedicated leadership to promote and protect the rights, wellbeing and best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

We recognise the rich and resilient culture, grounded in strong connection to community, family and Country, that continues to sustain and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. We are determined to see all children have access to family, community, and culture, with opportunities to develop a strong cultural identity.

We are committed to leading a child rights agenda in Queensland and assisting others to integrate a child rights approach in everything they do. We strive to uphold the four core principles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC):

1. non-discrimination
2. devotion to the best interests of the child
3. the right to life, survival and development
4. respect for the views of the child.

The following work was undertaken by the First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team in line with this commitment in 2023–2024:

- First Nations Queensland Consultative Body engagement and consultation project (refer to strategic objective 4, p.61)
- Principle Focus, including the Principle Focus dashboard (refer to strategic objective 1, p.34)
- *Thematic analysis of provisionally approved kinship carers who receive a subsequent Blue Card negative notice* (refer to strategic objective 2, p.47)
- Young, Black & Proud Scholarships (refer to strategic objective 3, p.67)
- *First Nations Children's Report* (refer to strategic objective 2, p.49)
- Hymba Yumba's year 13 trial (refer to strategic objective 4, p.63)

- Screening of Last Daughter (refer to strategic objective 5, p.74)
- *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023* (refer to strategic objective 2, p.51)
- Children’s Week 2023 (refer to strategic objective 4, p.51)
- Child Rights Dialogue (refer to strategic objective 4, p.63)

Through the 2024–2025 Budget announcement, the government advised that \$1.5 million will be allocated for seven full-time equivalent (FTE) staff to support our First Nations focussed work and an additional \$200,000 to expand the Young, Black & Proud Scholarship program.

This is the first time that a government has provided explicit resourcing for the Commissioner, and the one-year funding provides time for government to consider the model of establishment for an Independent First Nations Children’s Commissioner in alignment with the public commitment to deliver this reform.

Priorities

The First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy team will continue to deliver work to expressly address our explicit commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families through the continuation and expansion of the Young, Black & Proud Scholarships, quarterly monitoring of Principle Focus data, and promotion of the strengths and achievements of First Nations children, young people and their families. The child rights focus for 2024–2025 includes the development and publication of the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2024*, amplifying the voices, stories and experiences of Queensland children and young people.

OBJECTIVE ONE

1. Ensuring systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and families

Accountability is essential within any system that impacts on vulnerable populations. This is particularly true when decisions about the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and their families are made. The intent of our oversight function is to identify changes to laws, policies, programs and services that can improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Throughout 2023–2024 our work sought to assure the community that government agencies are fulfilling their responsibilities.

We did this by:

- identifying and monitoring emerging trends and issues through analysis, evaluation, audit and review
- publishing an oversight forward work plan to ensure transparency around our work
- bringing together evidence, the experiences of children and young people, and the insights of stakeholders to produce high-impact analyses and evaluations of system performance
- providing high-quality advice about improving the performance of the systems impacting children, young people and their families
- monitoring the implementation of reforms, recommendations and government initiatives.

This work was further informed by our explicit commitments to:

- conducting systemic reviews to increase our understanding of the dynamics and drivers of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in statutory systems and recommending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led solutions
- regularly monitoring and reporting on children’s equitable enjoyment of their rights across Queensland.

Key achievements

Throughout 2023–2024, we undertook reviews and published reports on the effect systems were having on children, young people and families. We routinely gathered information and insights from young people and families, strategic partners, advisory groups, research bodies, and the public to identify and report on trends or emerging issues. Using this data and our Child Death Register data, we improved the sector’s understanding of risk factors and supported the development of new policies and practices to reduce harm to children and young people.

The transparency with which we undertook our oversight responsibilities led to significant system responsiveness, and ultimately, system change.

The Queensland Government announced significant positive change influenced by work conducted by the QFCC. This included:

- legislative reform focussed on the Blue Card Scheme (influenced by the *Thematic analysis of the blue card scheme*)
- increased access to free kindy, particularly for families with vulnerabilities (influenced by the Life trajectories report)
- improved reporting to oversight bodies on watch houses (influenced by the *Who’s responsible* watch house report)
- focussed investment on First Nations housing (influenced by the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023* and *QFCC Youth Summit Report*)
- the establishment of a peak body for youth justice (influenced by the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*)
- funding for 85 behaviour specialists in 299 primary schools (influenced by the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022–23*)
- \$65 million dedicated to providing more sustained health home visiting and antenatal support and \$11.09 million for essentials including access to the culturally responsive and evidence-based Pēpi-Pod® Program (influenced by the *Deaths of children and young people Queensland 2022–23* report and *Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) Research Report*)
- the review of the home education accreditation scheme (influenced by the *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022–23*)
- dedicated funding to increase housing and support services for young mothers, babies and families (influenced by the *Parenting as a Young Person Report*)
- the introduction of the *Child Safe Organisations Bill 2024* (influenced by the *Submission on the Review of the QFCC Act*)

- a children’s plan for Queensland with clear priorities and investment – delivered through *Putting Queensland Kids First* (influenced by the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*)
- \$15 million for a dedicated partnership fund for non-government organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ATSICCOs) *First Nations Children’s Report 2023* and *Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2022–23* Recommendations 1 and 2).

Oversight reviews

We scan and analyse what is known about an issue and the broader system policy, program, practice and reform environment. To achieve this we gather, review and analyse legislation, policies, procedures, practices, literature, quantitative data and interjurisdictional models to understand the operating environment (including improvements underway) and intended outcomes for children and families. Engaging with young people, responsible agencies, sectors and other stakeholders to enable us to identify the causes of the issue, the impact it is having on children and families and opportunities for improvement.

We advise agencies, sectors and stakeholders about issues scheduled for review and invite and facilitate contributions and insights. We publicly report on issues scheduled for a discovery review through our *Oversight Forward Workplan*. To communicate our findings to key stakeholders, we publish to a variety of channels and embed key messages and data into issue papers, reports, submissions, correspondence and social media content.

Examination reviews

These reviews involve extensive research, including the analysis and synthesis of systemic issues to determine solutions-focussed recommendations for change. We do this by undertaking a comprehensive review of the system in consultation with stakeholders and by gathering insights from children, families, sector and the public. Engagement activities including consultation sessions and interviews enable us to identify solutions for, and intended outcomes of, change.

Over a three to 12-month period, a comprehensive review of quantitative and qualitative data is undertaken, and multiple research methods are used to examine the broad system including the structural and relational elements driving an issue, the experiences of children, families and sector and the changes needed to make improvements.

Exiting youth detention: preventing crime by improving post-release support

Youth justice is an issue of strong community debate in Queensland, yet the voices of young people rarely feature in the conversation. Young people hold the truth about the circumstances that led them to offend and their views on what they need to effectively change their behaviour should be paramount in our consideration of youth justice policy.

To conduct this review, we spoke directly to 66 young people in or recently released from youth detention. Many expressed that feeling rejected by their communities is a significant

disincentive to contribute positively and change their behaviour for the better. Family members and frontline workers were also interviewed. In Queensland, we are seeing high numbers of young people reoffend within 12-months of their release from youth detention and we sought to understand why the responses we are providing are not effective.

Our report, *Exiting youth detention: preventing crime by improving post-release support*, found transition plans and rehabilitation programs are not as effective as they could be, and negative community views about young people are a disincentive for young people to change their behaviour. The report makes two recommendations:

1. The Queensland Government fund and deliver a dedicated 12-month post-detention transition program that incorporates in-home family interventions and effective engagement in education, training and employment. Entry to this program should commence as part of case management of every young person as soon as they enter detention and should prioritise both their, and their family's, direct participation. Program delivery must incorporate family and community participation that seeks to address criminogenic causes in the young person's life that commences prior to their release from custody.
2. The post-detention transition program developed under Recommendation 1 should form part of a broader approach by the Queensland Government to target investment in a developmental approach to crime prevention. Programs and services developed as part of such investment must address risk factors and promote protective factors associated with youth crime. At a minimum these should tackle the known factors associated with involvement in the youth justice system (family dysfunction; domestic and family violence; drug and alcohol use; education disengagement; mental health issues; housing instability; and poverty) and should promote continuity of support and of relationships with key individuals whether the young person is in custody or in the community. This will require a coordinated and focussed whole-of-government approach that draws on and integrates existing housing, employment, health, education, mental health, justice and federally commissioned programs.

Who's responsible: Understanding why young people are being held longer in Queensland watch houses

In February 2023, the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) raised concerns with us regarding 13 young people who had been detained in a watch house for a period of 25 to 32 days. These concerns came on the back of a slew of evidence available from a variety of sources, including ABC 4 Corners, Amnesty International, the Youth Advocacy Centre, the Australian Children's Commissioner, and the Queensland Human Rights Commissioner, all of whom raised concerns relating to the treatment of young people in Queensland watch houses.

We undertook a review of the issues contributing to extended stays in Queensland watch houses, with a specific focus on why it was occurring, and who was empowered to monitor and address the issue. The review was conducted over a six-month period during which time we sought access to significant volumes of data, and during which time the Queensland

Government made multiple changes to the laws and policies impacting the use of watch houses. It reviewed a random sample of case files relating to 30 children identified by the OPG as having spent extended periods of time in a watch house between 2022 and 2023. Of the case files, 97 per cent related to First Nations young people.

The review found that a separation of responsibilities across police, courts and youth justice means no one is directly responsible or accountable for how long a young person spends in a watch house. Additional findings included:

- young people held in watch houses are staying longer
- family circumstances are influencing bail decision outcomes
- court bail refusals have increased, and bail granted has decreased
- extended watch house use disproportionately impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- youth detention centres have been holding an increasing number of unsentenced young people
- youth detention centres are routinely operating above ‘safe capacity’.

The review made five recommendations to the Queensland Government:

1. Youth Justice, the courts and the Queensland Police Service (QPS) collaborate to monitor the drivers identified in this report and report back to us with a proposed action plan to reduce the length of time young people spend in watch houses
2. Youth Justice immediately amend the reporting it provides to oversight bodies on the number of young people held in watch houses to also include the time they have spent in the watch house
3. the Queensland Government establishes a single point of accountability for producing regular (at least quarterly) public reports on the number and circumstances of young people held in watch houses (including age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, location and time spent in watch houses)
4. the QPS and Youth Justice improve the information they record about the circumstances of a young person’s detention, the full context behind bail and remand decisions, and the extent to which their needs and rights are being addressed while in custody
5. DJAG identifies strategies for courts to reduce the length of time young people are in unsentenced custody.

The week following the release of the report DJAG commenced daily reporting to us on the number of young people in watch houses, and the number of days for the highest length of stay. The Queensland Police Commissioner outlined immediate action being taken in response to our recommendations, including a review of engagement with oversight agencies including the provision of data access to ensure agencies can effectively perform their regulatory roles.

Growing Up in Queensland report and dashboard

Growing Up in Queensland is our flagship report that amplifies the voices and experiences of children and families across Queensland. Commencing in 2018,³³ the report was initially designed to provide Queensland's children and young people an opportunity to speak up and have a say about their everyday lives, priorities, concerns and visions for their communities and futures. A second iteration of this report was undertaken in 2020,³⁴ during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, we paused the data collection component to take stock of what we had already heard from children and young people, culminating in *Safe spaces: Growing Up in Queensland 2022*.³⁵ The approach for the 2024 report was to collate available data against the six interconnected domains of the ARACY's Nest Wellbeing Framework to present the story of what it is like 'growing up in Queensland'.

*Growing Up in Queensland: A story of child and family wellbeing*³⁶ is a comprehensive reference for researchers and policy- and decision-makers, containing extensive data and evidence about key issues affecting Queensland families. Data is mapped to the six interconnected wellbeing domains of: feeling valued, loved and safe; having material basics; being healthy; being engaged in education; participating in their communities; and having a positive sense of identity and culture. The report also examines outcomes for children living in OOHC and First Nations children. By drawing on broader surveys, administrative data sources and public reporting, we can better fulfil our legal role to promote and advocate for the responsibility of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people.

The report captures what is great about growing up in Queensland – we heard that most Queensland children and young people have someone who supports them, and most feel valued and loved. We also discovered opportunities for improvement – up to two in five young people report experiencing high psychological distress; rates of school attendance and completion have dropped; and young people feel they do not have opportunities to contribute to discussions about issues that affect them.

To bring life to the immense amount of data within the report, we launched our Data Explorer,³⁷ collating rich data from a number of reputable sources to present how children's wellbeing is shaped by their families, neighbourhoods, communities, governments and systems. Data Explorer provides a highly accessible platform to inform research, policy, organisational direction and commentary.

Stakeholders have responded positively to this innovative approach of data storytelling, with the Department of Transport and Main Roads interested to learn more about how our innovative approach could inform the delivery of the department's *Road Safety Education Blueprint*.

Risks for children caused by methamphetamine use by parents

The impact on a child when their parent prioritises illicit drug use (due to addiction) can be profound and permanent. In 2022, the Board reflected on the high number of deceased children and young people whose parents experienced addiction to methamphetamines. Of the 170 cases reviewed by the Board from 1 July 2020 until 30 June 2023, methamphetamine use was present in 32.9 per cent of cases.

Commissioned by the Board, QFCC staff organised and published a research paper, *Risks for children caused by methamphetamine use by parents*.³⁸ This report has been prepared under section 29D of the Act, which enables the Board to carry out, or engage persons to carry out, research relevant to reviews of the child protection system following the deaths of children connected to it.

The research, conducted with the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, University of Queensland, analysed 32 de-identified cases where there was evidence of parental methamphetamine use in the 12-months prior to a child's death to identify potential opportunities for system improvements to respond to and reduce the risk of harm to children known to the child protection system.

The research serves as a critical piece of awareness raising and will be shared with frontline workers to provide additional guidance on better responding to and supporting parents who use methamphetamines.

Queensland Paediatric Sepsis Mortality Study

During stakeholder consultation on the *Safer pathways through childhood*³⁹ framework in 2022, the Queensland Paediatric Sepsis Program (QPSP) requested we quantify and report on the number of child deaths from sepsis, using our child death data.

Sepsis is a leading cause of death and disability for Queensland children,⁴⁰ leading to more deaths in children than cancer. It is a time-critical illness whereby the risk of death increases by between four to eight per cent with every hour by which treatment with effective antibiotics is delayed.⁴¹

Completed in partnership with QPSP, the *Queensland Paediatric Sepsis Mortality Study* is an Australia-first, and possibly the first of its kind globally. Its aim was to identify every sepsis-related child death that occurred in Queensland between 2004 and 2021 in hospitals, at home or in the community to better understand the true incidence of childhood sepsis and to find opportunities to better identify, treat and prevent it. It found that children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, those living in remote and very remote areas, and First Nations children are over-represented in the deaths.

The report makes five recommendations for practice improvement:

1. Where sepsis is known to have caused or contributed to death, this should be documented in the causes of death on the death certificate.

2. Death certifiers should document the pathogen responsible for death on the medical cause of death certificate where known. If a responsible pathogen cannot be identified via antemortem testing, the cause of death is arguably incompletely understood, and an autopsy should be recommended.
3. Media campaigns designed to increase caregiver and community awareness of sepsis and its symptoms should be developed, including culturally safe campaigns aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
4. Sepsis red flags should be embedded into the infection HealthPathways of all seven Primary Health Network regions in Queensland.
5. Coronial investigations of unexpected infection-related child deaths should involve a paediatric healthcare professional, to gather and record a detailed clinical history, including underlying medical conditions, vaccination history, and touchpoints with health services in the lead up to death. General practitioner and other health service records, including any laboratory test and culture results should be obtained and reviewed.

In response to our research the QPSP is developing education packages and implementation plans within the 16 Queensland Hospital and Health Services to upskill clinicians on death certification processes if sepsis is a known cause or contributor to death. The benefit of this initiative is expected to be better identification of sepsis in children, including improved death records.

Oversight of Residential Care Review Model

In July 2023, the Queensland Government announced a review of Queensland's residential care system. It was requested that Commissioner Twyford provide independent oversight and advice on the review's process and outcomes. The review aimed to develop an understanding of specific cohorts and their needs, explore evidence-based models, supports and interventions, and confirm theory of change to improve outcomes for children. In recent years, the number of children under 12, including infants, being placed into residential care has increased. In July 2022, there were 490 children under 12 years living in residential care settings across Queensland, a figure more than double that of 2019.⁴²

As part of our strategic oversight of the review, we spoke with more than 200 workers, visited 16 residential care homes, and hosted workshops with young people who have experience living in residential care. Commissioner Twyford and QFCC staff travelled to Cairns, Rockhampton, Townsville, Mount Isa and the Sunshine Coast to attend the workshops. This was an opportunity to hear directly from, and listen to, the child protection sector and frontline staff, children and young people. We published monthly reports detailing the progress of the review.⁴³

Commissioner Twyford spoke about his observations at the Ministerial Roundtable and we held a lived experience specific forum for young people raised in residential care. The forum provided a space for young people to share their ideas about the improvements needed for the

residential care system and to engage in solutions-mapping. These ideas and discussions were captured in the *I was raised by a checklist report*, published in October 2023.

In February 2024, the Queensland Government released *A roadmap for residential care in Queensland*,⁴⁴ marking the halfway point of the review. The roadmap identified the QFCC as providing ongoing oversight of its implementation, providing an opportunity to explore how other government agencies can better prioritise the needs of young people in residential care.

Informed by the key concerns raised throughout the review process from young people and the sector, we released our response to the roadmap.⁴⁵ The response centred around the need to better support kinship carers and placements; reappraise the design and intent of residential care; review funding and approval processes for providers; stabilise the workforce and build capability; and better integrate residential care with other government services. In addition to the roadmap, the key messages drawn from the review were:

- there are opportunities for new effort and investment to support kinship carers that will take immediate pressure off the residential care system – however both the existence of, and perception of, rules is preventing this effort
- there is a clear gap between the available foster and kinship carer models and the residential care model, with children being escalated into residential care models unnecessarily and the opportunity to contract alternative home-based services have been missed
- the concept of residential care has lost its nuance – there is opportunity to make a profound difference across the system by bringing more nuance to the type of services we are seeking and committing to this specialisation
- much of the current residential care system is operating as disability support accommodation for children
- there is a discrete place for residential care in the OOHC system
- funding processes and approvals are actively working against child-focussed and family-based outcomes – both in the design and commissioning of innovation, and in the contract management of funded services
- risk management, finance and workforce laws within the residential care system work against providers making a ‘home-based environment’ where friends and family support young people
- there are real benefits to be gained from greater professionalisation and support for our residential care sector – the benefits of stable care teams for children cannot be overstated
- there is a strong desire, and anecdotal evidence, that government departments and services including education, police, housing, youth justice, health and mental health, do not act in a way that recognises the state is the parent to these young people
- location-based shortages for specific services to support children in OOHC and residential care is impacting access and engagement in tailored, specialised treatment

- there are people in communities who would be willing to care for a child, however, more needs to be done to identify these family members and support them to care for their family rather than children being placed in residential care
- there is a need for culturally informed assessments of safety, risk and safeguarding
- there remains a tension between the decision-making authority of the department, and service providers needing to make choices to meet the daily needs of children in residential care
- more can be done to help children stay close to the locations and communities they know
- the need to have access to a stable and capable workforce.

We will continue to provide an ongoing oversight role in the implementation of the roadmap over the next three years, which will involve continued consultation with young people with experience of residential care and constructive engagement with government agencies and the sector.

System review into the use of Permanent Care Orders for First Nations children

Permanent Care Orders (PCOs) commenced in 2018, as part of a broader permanency framework to promote timely outcomes for children in care by providing relational, physical and legal stability and providing them a permanent home. We are committed to understanding the drivers of disproportionality and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the statutory child protection system. In line with our explicit commitment to First Nations children and young people, this report increases our understanding of data about the use of PCOs.

Further, no public data exists on how many PCOs for First Nations children have been granted to First Nations kin, First Nations carers or non-Indigenous carers, meaning it is difficult to understand how placement hierarchy requirements within the *Child Protection Act 1999* are applied.

We observed an increase in the use of PCOs during 2021–2022 and conducted a review in 2023 to examine how PCOs were being used for First Nations children. We wanted to ensure the PCOs were being granted to kin and/or First Nations kin in line with the permanency principles for First Nations children and ATSI CPP.

To perform this review, we examined data pertaining to First Nations children subject to PCOs during 2021–2022 and the demographics of permanent guardians, and mapped the legislative, policy and practice changes that have occurred since the introduction of PCOs in Queensland.

We learnt that an increasing number of First Nations children and young people are being placed on PCOs with kin in accordance with the ATSI CPP. The findings were positive for First Nations children placed on PCOs, with 100 per cent of Orders made to kin in 2021–2022. Most children lived with their guardian for two years prior to the PCO being made, a quarter lived with their guardian for over five years, and almost 50 per cent were finalised within three

months. The report system review into the use of PCOs for First Nations children summarises our findings and highlights that in 2021–2022:

- First Nations children were placed within kin and culture. In 2021–2022, 100 per cent of PCOs were made to kin (28 of 28), and of the 28 PCOs made, 26 were granted to First Nations kin
- most children lived with their guardian for over two years prior to the PCO being made and a quarter lived with their guardian for over five years
- almost 50 per cent of PCOs were finalised within three months, a significant achievement to reaching timely permanency for First Nations children with kin and stopping statutory involvement as quickly as possible.

The placement of First Nations children with kin continues to be monitored as part of the Principle Focus initiative.

Child Death Review Board Annual Report

The Board's Annual Report 2022–2023, tabled in Parliament on 14 March 2024, included six recommendations for government consideration. They related to assessing the safety of children who are registered for home education; reappraising the response to youth crime and the purpose of youth justice; improving research on the needs of First Nations communities; strengthening child safety practice in response to parental substance and methamphetamine use; and assisting workers to recognise and respond to parental deception. By 31 October 2024, the Board will report to the Minister on its 2023–2024 operations, including responses to its earlier recommendations.

Discovery reviews

Discovery reviews are rapid in nature and consider multiple data sources as well as a mix of quantitative and qualitative data sources. Content analysis forms part of these reviews, as do stakeholder consultations. Over a four to 12-week period we identify key issues and solutions pertaining to a systemic issue, determine the priorities for further examination and identify whether a comprehensive examination is appropriate.

Wandering: Results from a survey about childhood independence

As children grow, they naturally seek increasing independence from their parents and carers. Childhood independence assists young people to develop a sense of self, an ability to be self-reliant and a strong sense of self-esteem. The *British Children's Play Survey*⁴⁶ was conducted in 2020 to explore children's play, independent mobility and adults' views of, and tolerance for, risky play. The study showed factors such as geographical location impacted independent mobility, while parental views on risk-taking impacted the amount of time children spent playing.

This study sparked curiosity and interest as to how similar factors have impacted children's independent mobility in Queensland over time. We conducted an online survey to gather information about what it is, or was, like growing up in Queensland across generations. The survey explored the perception that our parents and grandparents had more freedom to wander from their homes and explore their neighbourhoods without adult supervision.

Wandering: Results from a survey about childhood independence insights paper revealed that children from previous generations have been allowed to wander both further and for longer periods, while differences were evident between children who lived in major cities versus those living rurally.

Absent from Care

Young people who are absent from care placements are at significant risk of exploitation. This paper⁴⁷ explores the issue of Queensland children staying somewhere that is not their approved placement, the reasons why they might leave their placement, the risks they face when absent from care, and what needs to change to ensure they are safe and supported.

We identified that Brisbane Emergency Response Outreach Service is the only service available to young people who are not staying in their care placement and that this service is the only of its kind available in Brisbane and surrounds, highlighting that similar programs need to be considered more broadly across Queensland.

Further opportunities for improvement are also presented including flexible, innovative and relationship-based responses to address the reasons why young people leave their placements, and to provide support until a safe alternative is established.

This paper was released alongside the *Safe and Sound in Queensland: Enhancing safety for young people who go missing from care toolkit*⁴⁸, funded by a joint partnership between Project Paradigm, PeakCare and the QFCC. The paper raises awareness about the issue and the number of young people that are impacted, while the toolkit provides a best practice guide for frontline workers to prevent and respond to absences from care.

Carer allowances

Children and young people living in foster, kinship or residential care are some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Queensland. When children and young people are not able to live safely with their parents it is the responsibility of Child Safety to ensure they have appropriate care arrangements.

To enhance our understanding of the demand of, and forecast analysis for, the foster and residential care systems, and to inform our strategic advice on the *Residential Care Roadmap*, we published the *Carer allowances* insight paper.⁴⁹ This paper outlines the current carer allowance rates across Australia and the increase in cost-of-living expenses for Queensland families to consider whether Queensland carer allowances can meet the needs of the children and young people they care for.

Preserving a vital system: The future of foster care

The Queensland foster carer demographic insights report, *Preserving a vital system: The future of foster care*,⁵⁹ was published in partnership with PeakCare and The Demographics Group, and presents a demographic analysis of foster carers in Queensland. Queensland faces a critical shortage of traditional foster carers despite strong population growth. Generational, geographic, and socio-economic factors contribute to this decline, necessitating systemic reform to revitalise the foster care system.

The report suggests that the co-creation of a contemporary foster care system that involves collaboration between researchers, policy-makers, peak bodies, agencies, intersecting systems, carers, children and young people, and their families is the best way forward. Ten opportunities to improve the foster care system are offered, including adequate foster carer and agency supports, foster care leave for Queensland public sector employees, the development of more flexible foster care models, the professionalisation of home-based care, targeted recruitment and engagement with First Nations communities.

Parenting as a young person: Don't underestimate us

Many young parents experience social exclusion and isolation, which can hamper their ability to parent effectively. This can be amplified for young parents with a care experience, who may be reluctant to access formal support services due to stigma and feeling stereotyped by health professionals and social workers.

We undertook a discovery review to build a statistical picture that describes pregnant or parenting young people in Queensland and factors that increase the risk of young parenthood. Further, current strategies, policies, available service systems and case studies were reviewed to identify structural and community contexts for young parents and the enablers and barriers to accessing education, housing, parenting supports, income supports and specific services for parents and their children (including funded live-in residential services).

These findings are reported in the insights paper, *Parenting as a young person: Don't underestimate us*, which describes the context of young pregnancy and parenthood, and outlines some of the barriers to help-seeking that young parents face before and after childbirth, as well as those things that enable them to access support. This paper is intended to add to the evidence available on young parenting in Queensland and proposes how the services and supports available to young parents and their children can be improved.

The findings point to the importance of interventions and supports being developed with recognition of young parents' inherent capabilities and strengths in raising children and to be respectful of their decision to raise their child. Programs to support young women are limited in Queensland, and especially so for those living outside major metropolitan areas. There is also a lack of recognition, and hence support for, fathers and their contribution to their children's development, wellbeing and mental health.

This paper resulted from an information sharing agreement with Queensland Health, Health and Wellbeing Queensland, the Brisbane Youth Service, Youth and Family Service, Integrated

Family and Youth Service (IFYS), and Micah Projects. Based on the analysis outlined in the paper, we recommended the continuation, expansion and commencement of investment across several areas.

Principle Focus

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be removed from their parents and placed in OOHC at rates significantly greater than non-Indigenous children. This is the most confounding challenge facing the Queensland child protection system.

In 2023–2024, a key priority has been consolidating and extending our critical oversight role as it pertains to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. Identifying systemic issues, advocating for improvements and monitoring the impact of those changes is a critical function of a contemporary Children’s Commission.

One of the most significant issues that warrants urgent attention and action is the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory child protection system. This issue is identified as a target under the *Closing the Gap*⁵¹ agreement, a priority reform under *Safe and Supported – the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children*⁵² and is the focus of Queensland’s *Our Way Strategy*⁵³. An important function of the Commission is to monitor progress against state and national goals.

There have been significant reforms and investment, but as highlighted in the recent *Productivity Commission Report on Closing the Gap*, there has been no clear mechanism of accountability or capacity to examine the impact of those reforms, particularly at a regional and local level.

To address that, we developed and have continued to build on, the Principle Focus program of work. This program monitors and examines the dynamics and drivers of this over-representation in Queensland’s child protection system. The program goes beyond the identification of challenges to present an opportunity for identifying promising practices and provide a platform to encourage exceptional examples to become the norm.

Addressing the issue required reducing rates of entry to the system as well as managing the duration of time in care, and increasing the rates of exits from care, ideally through safe, successful reunifications and family restoration. The Commission has long supported the need to increase transparency and the accessibility of data relating to over-representation. Improving access to localised data and incorporating the insights and perspectives of those working on the ground with families in each region, aims to create visibility, greater accountability and a more nuanced understanding about what is working well and what requires action.

We also seek to clarify the improvements required to redress the drivers of overrepresentation that exist in other areas of social policy, beyond the locus of control of the child protection system. This includes the experience of poverty, housing instability and homelessness, domestic and family violence (DFV), mental health and substance misuse.

We are committed to pursuing matters raised by Principle Focus, including:

- advocating for a moratorium on adverse action by the Department of Housing while a child is subject to formal child protection intervention
- further examining First Nations children on long-term guardianship orders to First Nations kin, non-Indigenous kin carers and foster carers to ensure self-determination is at the heart of all decisions and determine if a ‘family restoration’ measure is appropriate
- seeking a change in funding practices to support self-determination at a local level and ensure community demands are being met
- driving system-wide reforms identified by the Productivity Commission review across universal, secondary and tertiary systems
- ensuring the Queensland Government implements the recommendations from our analysis of the Blue Card scheme on kinship carers.

In 2023–2024 we publicly launched the Principle Focus dashboard monitoring over-representation statewide and regionally. Each region has a ‘story behind the data’ that identifies the key barriers to reducing over-representation, highlights promising practices, and gives localised context to the data. The data will be updated quarterly and aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of over-representation, transparency and promote clear accountability regarding addressing this critical systemic issue. Dashboard updates will take place with continued support of DCSSDS, and ATSICCOs, and will enable communities and partners to track progress towards eliminating over-representation and advocate for the continued implementation of the ATSICPP and Council of Australian Governments Priority Reforms, in the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The findings and ongoing monitoring will assist in meeting the state’s performance reporting obligations under *Closing the Gap* and the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children*, but importantly provide clear advice to government as to what additional efforts and potential reforms are required to achieve the intended outcome of the *Our Way Strategy*. It also aligns with the Productivity Commission’s recommendations in its review of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, specifically around strengthening accountability.

The crossover cohort

The issue of ‘the crossover cohort’ between the youth justice system and the child protection system has received attention during both the recent Review of Residential Care in Queensland and the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee process. As part of our legislative function, we sought to understand the current number and demographics of the young people involved in both systems and requested data held by the Department of Youth Justice (DYJ) under section 35 of the Act.

We undertook a short statistical study into the crossover between youth justice and child protection to provide relevant data from the different perspectives. Our intention was to provide statistical clarity as there are different answers on this matter both before Parliament

and in the media ranging from three per cent to 50 per cent. This inconsistency in the reported data is a barrier to adequate system response and the pursuit of advocacy in this space.

In March 2024, we released *Fast facts: The crossover cohort – The extent of the crossover between the Queensland youth justice and child protection systems*. The data collected as part of this study revealed that:

- a significant proportion of young people living in Queensland youth detention centres are currently subject to a child protection order – as at 30 June 2023, 20.7 per cent of young people living in Queensland youth detention centres (51 out of 246) were subject to both a supervised youth justice order and a child protection order⁵⁴
- in 2023, First Nations children were almost three times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be on both child protection and youth justice orders
- a significant proportion of young people who have been identified as serious repeat offenders (SROs) are currently subject to a child protection order – as at 30 June 2023, of the 452 Queensland young people classified as SROs, 133 (29.4%) had an active child protection order⁵⁵
- more than half of young people who had been in youth justice supervision during 2020–2021 had also had an interaction with the child protection system in the last five years.

On 10 June 2024, the Queensland Indigenous Legal Service quoted the publication at a Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee’s public hearing regarding the *Community Safety Bill 2024*.

The Commission will continue to investigate this crossover cohort to identify trends and opportunities for advocacy, awareness and amplification.

Requests for information

In 2023–2024, we exercised our legislative powers under section 35 on 13 occasions to request general information about data, funding and service delivery from other public entities (see Table 1). This included requests for information about children and young people’s involvement in family support, child protection, youth justice, policing and education systems and data on placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Agencies complied with our requests by sharing data (or agreeing to share data in the coming months) to inform our monitoring and review functions.

1. System accountability

Table 1: List of section 35 requests in 2023–2024

To	Purpose	Received
DCSSDS	Data about children, young people and families in Queensland that come in contact with the Child Safety system – <i>Growing Up in Queensland</i>	September 2023
QPS	Requesting data about drivers that result in Queensland children entering and remaining in watch houses	August 2023
DYJ	Ongoing response to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee and the Justice Policy Partnership work	February 2024
DCSSDS	Requesting data with intention of seeking a better understanding of the experiences and needs of young people in residential care in Queensland – data relates to <i>My life in care survey 2023</i>	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
OPG	Ongoing information regarding the arrest and detention of young people in police watch houses	May 2024
Office of the Director Child Protection Litigation	To explore and understand the drivers that result in the over-representation of First Nations children and young people within the child protection system – Principle Focus dashboard	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
DCSSDS	To understand the extend of placement stability experienced by Queensland children in OOHC - Placement turnover, stability and self-placing review	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
DYJ	Data relevant to children’s experiences of the rights articles contained in the UNCRC – <i>2024 Queensland Child Rights Report</i> and data associated with the experience of First Nations children and young people in the youth justice system	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
QPS	Data relevant to children’s experiences of the rights articles contained in the UNCRC – <i>2024 Queensland Child Rights Report</i> Data associated with the experience of First Nations children and young people in the Queensland youth justice system – Principle Focus	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
DCSSDS	Data relevant to the performance of the child protection system as per section 40 of the <i>Family and Child Commission Act</i>	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
DYJ	Data relevant to the performance of the child protection system as per section 40 of the <i>Family and Child Commission Act</i>	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
DoE	Data relevant to the performance of the child protection system as per section 40 of the <i>Family and Child Commission Act</i>	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)
QPS	Data relevant to the performance of the child protection system as per section 40 of the <i>Family and Child Commission Act</i>	Awaiting data (as at June 2024)

Monitoring and reporting on child deaths

We are responsible for maintaining and reporting on the Queensland Child Death Register, which records the deaths of all children and young people under the age of 18 in Queensland. We are responsible for several functions relating to child deaths in Queensland, including:

- maintaining a register of all child deaths in Queensland based on notifications from the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages and details of all child deaths reported to the Office of the State Coroner
- researching the risk factors associated with child deaths and making recommendations to prevent such deaths occurring
- preparing an Annual Report on child deaths.

By 31 October each year, we provide a report on trends in child deaths to the Minister for tabling in Parliament. Our reports on trends in child deaths receive public and media attention and raise awareness of the preventative actions needed by government and communities to foster safer environments and provide support to children and young people. The *Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people, Queensland, 2022–23* was tabled on 14 March 2024. This report is intended to identify risk factors in deaths that are preventable so that action can be taken by relevant stakeholders.

The deaths of 448 children (revised) were registered in Queensland from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023, with natural causes accounting for 73 per cent of these deaths. Transport deaths was the leading cause of non-natural causes of death (28 deaths), closely followed by suicide (20 deaths).

The report highlighted that some children are more vulnerable to experiencing adversity, including experiences that increase risk of death, than others. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children who are known to the child protection system are consistently and significantly over-represented in child mortality statistics (2.5 times the rate than for non-Indigenous children). Children known to Child Safety accounted for 16 per cent of all child deaths in the reporting period.

Preliminary data for the 2023–2024 report (outlined in Table 2) indicates a decrease in child deaths (422 recorded deaths compared with 448 recorded in 2022–2023). The number of child deaths from natural causes was 311, while the number from external causes (such as transport incidents or non-intentional injury-related deaths) was 69. The long-term trend is an overall decrease in child mortality rates since 2004 (down 2.2% per year on average).

First Nations children are over-represented in child deaths. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mortality rate was 2.5 times the non-Indigenous rate. According to preliminary data, 90 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child deaths have been recorded, compared to 94 deaths in total in 2022–2023.

Fifty-three children who died in 2023–2024 were known to the child protection system in the 12-months prior to their death. This compares to 72 deaths in 2022–2023.

Table 2: Preliminary data from Child Death Register 2023–2024

Deaths of children and young people	2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024 (preliminary as at June 2024)¹
By cause of death²			
Natural causes (e.g. disease)	271	335	311
Transport	33	28	20
Drowning	10	10	10
Other non-intentional injury	19	7	18
Suicide	20	20	19
Fatal assault and neglect	9	6	2
Unexplained cause - Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and Undetermined	42	30	8
Cause pending autopsy or coronial	6	12	34
Total	410	448³	422
By Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status			
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	71	94	90
Non-Indigenous	339	354	332
Known to the child protection system			
No involvement or ongoing intervention	26	35	22
Open intake event	1	5	2
Investigation and Assessment	25	16	22
Child Protection Order	12	9	4
Open Intervention with Parental Agreement	4	5	2
Support Service Case	1	1	1
Other child protection status	0	1	0
Total	69	72	53

¹ By 31 October each year, the Principal Commissioner must prepare and give to the Minister a report about information contained in the register and child death prevention activities. Data reported in this report may differ from data reported in the child death annual report where further information about the classification of death becomes available.

² Deaths by cause of death are subject to change as new information is received

³ Revised

We provide access to the Child Death Register to facilitate learnings from child death statistics and exploration of child death preventative measures. In 2023–2024, we responded to 25 requests from researchers and government agencies for detailed data from the register. Table 3 provides an overview of the key projects and agencies. This service is at no cost to researchers.

Table 3: Child death data requests by agency and purpose, 2023–2024

Type of data	Requesting agency	Purpose
All deaths	DoE	Background for consideration of funding additional supports to pregnant or parenting students in state school communities
	Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal	Notice to Produce information on deaths of children where the child had spent time in a watch house
	Request for information (Right to Information)	Respond to Right to Information request seeking information on deaths of children where the child had spent time in a watch house
Children known to the child protection system	Coroners Court of Queensland	Confirm child protection status in relation to coronial case investigation
	Queensland Child Death Review Board	Provide child death and coronial information required to undertake case reviews
Diseases and morbid conditions	Centre for Children’s Health Research	Scope opportunities to share data between the Child Death Register and the Paediatric Diabetes Registry
	Children and Young People Death Review Committee Australian Capital Territory	Report on the prevalence of deaths attributed to respiratory diseases and influenza across the states and territories
	CHQ	Investigation of the incidence of, and factors associated with, child deaths due to sepsis in Queensland (collaborative project with QFCC)
Drowning	Royal Life Saving Society Australia	Inform the National Drowning Report and drowning prevention research and advocacy
Fatal assault and neglect	QPS	Comparison of QFCC data and QPS statistics to ensure all relevant incidents have been captured
	Courier Mail	Filicide data as background for media article
Interstate residents	Children and Young People Death Review Committee Australian Capital Territory	Australian Capital Territory reporting on deaths of residents in other jurisdictions

Type of data	Requesting agency	Purpose
	Child Death Review and Prevention Committee Northern Territory	Northern Territory reporting on deaths of residents in other jurisdictions
	Child Death and Serious Injury Review Committee South Australia	South Australian reporting on deaths of residents in other jurisdictions
Non-intentional injury	Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit	Inform coronial investigation into caustic ingestion injuries and consideration of regulating dangerous household products
	Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit	Identify potential hazards in infant sleep devices to inform consideration of the Australian cot and portacot standard
	Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit	Identify potential hazards in child and infant clothing to inform discussion on industry best practice guides
Suicide	DCSSDS	Confirming details of suicide deaths of children who were known to the child protection system
	The Guardian	Enquiring if there is evidence of a suicide cluster in a region
Transport	ABC Sunshine Coast	Low speed run over data as background for media article

Notes: Not all requests are shown.

We will continue working with researchers and government agencies to raise community awareness and develop prevention programs and policies by identifying risk factors, trends and emerging safety hazards.

Recommendations

In 2023–2024, we made a total of 20 recommendations for improvements to systems that impact the wellbeing of Queensland children, young people and families, and an additional 40 explicit expectations. This small number of recommended critical reforms represents a strategic approach to ensure departments and government service systems can be focussed and agile in responding to our advice. This follows the *2022 Review of the Impact of the QFCC*.

In 2024, work commenced on our biennial review of open government recommendations, including the development of a status classification scheme to group recommendations for ease of monitoring. Consultation with agencies in receipt of recommendations determine the current status and evidence of impact.

Priorities

In 2024–2025, our oversight work will focus on delivering the critical system reviews outlined in the *Oversight Framework 2023–27* and implement our *Safer pathways through childhood 2024–2025* action plan. We will also issue our biennial review of the status of government recommendations and implement a new framework to support the monitoring of recommendations to government.

OBJECTIVE TWO

2. Raising awareness and advocating for children and their families

We lead efforts to ensure the safety, rights, and wellbeing of Queensland's children and families. We raise awareness and advocate for them, leveraging our unique legislated mandate and system-level perspective. Our objective analysis and advice supports government decisions and system improvements. Through various forums and channels, we influence change and contribute ideas to enhance child and family wellbeing, shaping legislation, policies, and practices for better outcomes.

We raise awareness and advocate for children and their families by:

- gathering insights and using evidence to form proactive positions and engaging in social policy discussions across government
- using diverse methods to effectively communicate the issues impacting on children to government, other agencies and the community
- providing independent, accurate and actionable intelligence to Queensland's Parliament and government decision makers
- providing leadership, information and resources to guide and support organisations and the community.

This work is further informed by our explicit commitments to:

- advocate to ensure the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are free of systemic racism
- promote the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities, and ATSICCOs and advocate for their full participation and control in decisions – to ensure the best interests of every child are met
- increase the awareness of the rights of children, and the responsibility of everyone to protect those rights.

Key achievements

Advocating on social policy issues

Throughout 2023–2024 we contributed evidence-based advice and solutions to government on a broad range of policy and legislative issues impacting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and families. We advocated for children, young people and their families at public hearings and inquiries to champion the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and influence positive changes in legislation, policies and practices.

We produced 32 written submissions with advice to state and national reviews and inquiries, as outlined in Table 4. Our submissions were referenced in public reports or cited in Parliamentary speeches and contributed to the development or revision of legislation and policies. We responded to requests for information and advice from government stakeholders on a range of issues, including youth justice, residential care, use of gendered language and use of certain police powers.

Table 4: Written submissions 2023–2024

State
1. Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs – Growing Child Safe Organisations in Queensland – Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement
2. DCSSDS – Queensland Residential Care System Review
3. Youth Justice Select Reform Committee – <i>Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland</i> – individual submission by Commissioner Twyford
4. Youth Justice Select Reform Committee – <i>Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland</i> – individual submission by Commissioner Lewis
5. DJAG – Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrator Strategy
6. Health and Environment Committee – Inquiry into the Health and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2023
7. Community Support and Services Committee – <i>Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009</i> , and <i>Penalties and Sentences Act 1992</i>
8. Department of Transport and Main Roads – <i>Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995</i>
9. DJAG – <i>Criminal Law (Coercive Control and Affirmative Consent) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023</i>
10. Queensland Ombudsman – West Moreton Youth Detention Centre - Use of separation, force and restraints, and searches of children, and the provision of health services to children at the centre (under s 12(2)(a) of the <i>Inspector of Detention Services Act</i>

11. Queensland Law Reform Commission – *Criminal Defences Review 2024*
12. DPC – *Putting Queensland Kids First*
13. Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee (CSLAC) – *Inquiry into the Victims' Commissioner and Sexual Violence Review Board Bill 2024*
14. QPS – *Police Powers and Responsibilities (Gender Diverse Safeguards) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*
15. CSLAC – *Corrective Services (Promoting Safety) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*
16. QPS – Firearms Prohibition Orders
17. Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce, DJAG – *Criminal Justice Legislation (Sexual Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2024*
18. DJAG – *Childrens Court Amendment Bill 2024*
19. Queensland Mental Health Commission (QMHC) – *Queensland Trauma Strategy 2024*
20. Housing, Big Build and Manufacturing Committee – *Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games Arrangements Amendment Bill 2024*
21. CSLAC – *Queensland Community Safety Bill 2024*
22. Health and Wellbeing Queensland – *Queensland Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024*
23. CSLAC – Criminal Code (Defence of dwellings)
24. Community Support and Services Committee – *Criminal Justice Legislation (Sexual Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2024*
25. Community Support and Services Committee – *Disability Services (Restrictive Practices) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*

National

1. Department of Social Services, Australian Government – *National Housing and Homelessness Plan*
2. National Office for Child Safety – *Understanding Sexual Behaviours Displayed by Children and Young People: National Principles and Key Terminology*
3. Office for Youth, Australian Government – *Australia's Youth Engagement Strategy*
4. Reforms to implement recommendations from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce

5. Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia – Discussion Papers (youth justice, health and mental health, education and child protection)
6. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts – *Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act 2021*

International

1. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner – Call for input on current issues and good practice in prison management

Hearings and inquiries

In 2023–2024, we provided evidence at the following Parliamentary hearings:

- **Youth Justice Reform Committee – public hearing:** On 24 November 2023, Commissioner Twyford spoke of the theory of punishment, emphasising the need to focus on rehabilitation. Commissioner Lewis spoke to the importance of community in effective youth justice reform and undertook to provide further information regarding the youth program she worked on in the USA, which is just one international example of alternatives to custody that are more effective in meeting the children and young people’s needs and keeping community safe.
- **Inquiry to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime – private briefing:** On 4 March 2024, Commissioner Twyford appeared as a witness at the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee’s private briefing for the inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland, and shared learnings from his oversight of the residential care review. This transcript has been made publicly available.
- **Inquiry into the Victims’ Commissioner and Sexual Violence Review Board Bill 2024 – public hearing:** On 25 March 2024, Commissioner Twyford, Commissioner Lewis and Executive Director Anne Edwards presented at the public hearing about children as victims of crime in their own right. Recommendation two of the CSLAC report directly referenced submissions made by the Commission.
- **Oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission – public hearing:** On 29 April 2024, Commissioner Twyford and Commissioner Lewis were asked about the Commission’s work, including the oversight of the residential care review, accessibility of data from other departments to undertake oversight work and the Commission’s Raising the age of criminal responsibility issues paper.
- **Community Safety Bill 2024 – public hearing:** On 24 May 2024, Commissioner Twyford and Commissioner Lewis appeared before the committee in response to the *Community Safety Bill 2024*. The Commissioners spoke of the need to rethink the purpose of detention, the importance of connection to community and the need for transparent accountability.

We also provided evidence and advice at the following inquests and hearings:

- **Inquiry into Australia’s Human Rights Framework – Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights:** On 15 August 2023, Commissioner Lewis gave evidence in support of a national Human Rights Act that fully incorporates the UNCRC, and advocated for strong protections for children and young people who do not experience the full enjoyment of their rights, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children and young people in detention, children and young people with disabilities, and children and young people in OOHC.
- **Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in South Australia:** On 12 October 2023, Commissioner Lewis gave evidence to the inquiry including sharing Queensland’s experience in implementing the child placement principles, the associated legislation and its translation into practice.
- **Coronial inquest into the deaths of Darcey-Helen Conley and Chloe-Ann Conley:** On 3 May 2024, Commissioner Twyford, in his capacity as Board chair, gave evidence at the inquest hearing which sought to determine the appropriateness of the response, the adequacy of the relevant policies and procedures prior to, and any action taken in response to, the deaths by Child Safety, Metro South Health and the QPS.

A call for Blue Card reform

Our report, *Thematic analysis of provisionally approved kinship carers who receive a subsequent Blue Card negative notice*, was published in October 2023, and examined issues relating to the impact of the Blue Card system on kinship carers that were consistently raised in engagements with these service providers and departmental officers. The resulting recommendations sought to remedy a long-standing systemic issue that has negatively impacted outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system. The report made two recommendations to the Queensland Government:

1. Remove the requirement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers, as defined in the *Child Protection Act 1999*, to hold a Blue Card if they are caring for children in their family.
2. Retain the existing departmental assessment and approval process, in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers, removing the provisional status period in the absence of the Blue Card condition.

The report also found the Blue Card scheme’s focus on employment suitability, rather than suitability to care for kin, gave limited consideration to the child’s best interests. Instead, the scheme is continuing to perpetrate the displacement of children away from their kin, culture and Country.

On 12 June 2024, the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*⁵⁶ was introduced to Parliament. The Bill’s reforms were noted

by the Minister in her introductory speech as having their ‘origins’ in our Blue Card report, and as being in response to our recommendations dating back to 2017. It directly responds to our report that detailed the limitations of the Blue Card scheme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families seeking to care for kin.

Every Queensland child has the right to be raised safely in their culture, connected to kin and Country. The Bill proposes to remove the requirement for kinship carers and adult household members to hold a Blue Card to care for family. These changes affirm the primacy of safety for each child, in every decision and acknowledge the critical role that cultural continuity plays in achieving safety for First Nations children.

Raising awareness through media and digital platforms

The primary vehicle for the QFCC to achieve its mission of influencing change is its communication channels. Use of our digital media platforms have grown exponentially over the last three years as sector professionals and community members seek relevant information on parenting, child safe policies, and direction to research and advice. In 2023–2024, we increased our engagement on our website and social media channels, which corresponds with an increase in media coverage and greater public exposure.

Our website received more than 156,000 views, an increase from 135,000 the previous year. Our reach on Facebook and Instagram exceeded 316,000, and we have grown our LinkedIn following by 151 per cent over the period.

Between May 2023 and April 2024, we featured in 2385 media reports, a 293 per cent increase from the previous year. An analysis of our media coverage showed our key messages resonated with our audiences. The leading positive message in the coverage was *the QFCC advocates for children*, which directly fulfils our strategic objective to raise awareness and advocate for children and their families. Our coverage over the period was overwhelmingly positive, with 93 per cent of all analysed mentions being positive or very positive, an increase from 89 per cent from the previous year. QFCC spokespeople were more prominently and frequently quoted in this period when compared with previous years, and our positive messages promoting our activities were far more prevalent.

The topics that attracted greatest media coverage and interest included:

- the release of our *Deaths of children and young people Queensland Annual Report 2022–2023*
- our *Queensland paediatric sepsis mortality study*, Australian-first research into the prevalence of sepsis in Queensland children
- release of our review into the use of watch houses to detain children
- the launch of *Growing Up in Queensland* report and Data Explorer
- our *2023 Queensland Child Rights Report*.

Cross-sector conferences and panels

Both Commissioners have been highly active and visible in their public appearances, attending conferences, keynote speeches and webinar presentations and delivering social and media channels to raise community awareness of key policy, program and practice issues impacting Queensland children and families.

In 2023–2024 we shared evidence and insights, and connected with stakeholders by speaking at, and participating in, conferences and panels, including:

- **Annual CREATE Foundation Conference** – Commissioner Twyford, Commissioner Lewis and QFCC staff travelled to Adelaide to attend the annual CREATE Foundation conference. It was an opportunity to speak with children in care, to listen to their stories and continue building a better way to provide state care. Young people were empowered to elevate their understanding of their legal rights. Commissioner Twyford participated in panels and delivered a keynote address titled “What I have learnt from children in care”.
- **Queensland Foster and Kinship Care Conference** – Commissioner Twyford and QFCC staff joined over 500 delegates, including carers, executives, delegated authority organisations, government representatives and non-government representatives, to discuss how the system can be improved to better support children and young people living in care. As the keynote speaker Commissioner Twyford shared his own life journey from being the son of foster carers to being Queensland’s Children’s Commissioner.
- **Annual SNAICC Conference** – Commissioner Lewis, along with Australian First Nations Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates, participated in a plenary panel at the annual SNAICC Conference, discussing the importance of upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their different functions and legislative powers and their shared commitment to advocating for children and young people.
- **Children, Trauma and the Law Conference** – Commissioner Lewis spoke of the over-representation and inter-generational trauma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Criminal Justice System alongside Stephen Ralph (forensic psychologist) and Binnie O’Dwyer (solicitor, Aboriginal Legal Service).
- **Education Roundtable** – Commissioner Lewis joined a roundtable of experts and stakeholders, convened by the Minister for Education and Youth Justice, to discuss how to improve responses to increasingly complex student need and behaviour, including Student Disciplinary Absences (SDAs). Held as part of the government’s commitment to further consultation on proposed amendments to the *Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024*, experts and stakeholders generously shared their perspectives and identified opportunities.
- **The Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies Bi-annual International Child Protection Conference** – Commissioner Lewis joined a panel of First Nations Commissioners to speak about accountability and partnership to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander children through the National Framework as part of the Safe and Supported panel.

- **Free and Equal Human Rights Conference** – Commissioner Lewis joined Anne Hollonds (National Children’s Commissioner); Professor John Tobin (The University of Melbourne); and Seleena Blackley (Youth Specialist and Cultural Facilitator) at the Free and Equal Human Rights Conference to speak on a range of topics including the *Human Rights Act* and how to improve the youth justice crisis.
- **Q Shelter policy launch** – Commissioner Twyford joined Professor Selena Bartlett (Queensland University of Technology) and Dr Fiona Oates (Q Shelter and James Cook University) to discuss the role of policy and practice in addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences. Commissioner Twyford urged attendees to focus on looking beyond the bricks and mortar of a house to consider what it really provides for families – safety and love.
- **CHQ Youth Summit** – Commissioner Lewis joined the CHQ Youth Summit in late October, where the theme was Empowering Young People through Collective Action. The annual summit brings leaders together across South East Queensland to promote interagency partnerships and positive outcomes for young people.
- **Adopt Change Thrive Conference** – Commissioner Twyford travelled to Sydney to attend the annual Adopt Change Thrive Conference. This year’s theme was A Home and Healing for Every Child and was held at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Each seat at the Sydney Cricket Ground, approximately 46,000 in total, represents a child in the care system. The conference has been delivered nationally since 2017 and is a call on each government to report on their commitment made in 2016 to prioritise permanency for children in care.
- **2024 Childhood Summit** – Commissioner Twyford attended the 2024 Childhood Summit hosted by the Australian Institute of Play, with this attendance being the catalyst for the QFCC’s Youth Summit 2024. The Childhood Summit prioritises the voice of children to be heard, validated and acted upon. The Commission will be sponsoring the 2025 Childhood Summit.
- **Child Protection Practitioners Association practice paper panel session** – Commissioner Lewis participated in a Child Protection Practitioners Association practice paper panel session in relation to the intersection between mental health and child protection and the implication for workers. The session concentrated on mental health issues in society, and increasingly in children, which continue to be a topic of concern.
- **Safeguarding Gathering** – Hosted by Edmund Rice Flexi Schools, Commissioner Lewis was invited to participate in a Q&A interview session with staff on how to draw on the strengths of First Nations students and offer them the best support and the safest environments. Topics included supporting students through complexities including tensions between two worlds, and situations where conflict between compliance and community obligations exist.

First Nations Children's Report 2023

In September 2023, we released our inaugural *First Nations Children's Report* which showcases the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, who are thriving despite the challenges of structural racism and the impacts of colonialism. The report demonstrates the strength and resilience of First Nations children, their families and communities and shows the positive outcomes that are possible when their rights are upheld.

It celebrates the diversity, beauty and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in Queensland and shows what's possible when they are centred in all decisions that affect their lives. The report is part of our commitment to truth-telling, a fundamental component of the Queensland Government's *Path to Treaty Act 2023*, which acknowledges the adverse effects of colonisation on First Nations peoples.

Queensland Child Rights Report 2023

Our inaugural *Queensland Child Rights Report* details how Queensland Government agencies are interpreting and implementing the UNCRC in policy, practice and legislation. This is an important report that brings transparency and accountability to children's rights in Queensland. It identifies areas where children and children's rights should be at the centre of decisions. While the report benefits all children and young people, it holds significant value for those who experience inequity, injustice and marginalisation

The 2023 report analysed child rights issues relating to the youth justice system; children's civil rights and freedoms; violence against children; the child protection system; disability, health and welfare; and education and play. It highlights Queensland's achievements in upholding children's rights, including enacting the *Queensland Human Rights Act 2019*, expressing a commitment to First Nations peoples through the *Path to Treaty Act 2023*, and action to address gender-based violence through the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. The development of a Children's Plan to improve coordination across government when developing strategies relating to children is proposed.

Children's Week 2023

Children's Week is a national celebration of childhood and children's rights. It creates opportunities to advocate and build awareness of children's rights throughout Queensland and celebrates the talents and abilities of all children.

We fund CRQ to support and deliver on the Children's Week initiative. This includes educational campaigns and projects aimed at embedding a child rights agenda across grassroots organisations, families and frontline delivery services in Queensland. In 2023, the week was held between 21–29 October and celebrated UNCRC Article 31 – *Children have the right to relax, play and take part in activities they enjoy*. This year, a children's rights song, "I am Me", was written and a video produced in partnership with Aunty Sharron Mirii Bell. As CRQ's Lead Ambassador, Commissioner Twyford presented awards to celebrate and honour

the outstanding contributions, initiatives, and advocacy undertaken by young people and organisations.

How to Help a Friend Pocket Guide

To support child sexual abuse prevention and education, we funded the distribution of the *Pocket Guide to Sexual Abuse: How to Help a Friend* to the value of \$20,280. Developed by Project Paradigm, the youth-friendly guide was designed to provide children aged 11 years and over with information.

The Project Paradigm team distributed 60,000 pocket guides to key organisations and institutions across the state, including Headspace, yourtown, Act for Kids, Life Without Barriers, and Brisbane Youth Service. Distribution was far and wide, including to remote areas of Mornington Island, Palm Island, Cooktown, Aurukun, Mount Isa and Charlesville.

“We are still getting requests coming through from a variety of agencies requesting copies, so we are currently working out how we can fulfil the ongoing need (we’ve clearly struck a chord!). Thanks so much for your support in the distribution of these guides, the feedback from frontline workers has been very, very positive indeed.” – Project Paradigm staff member

Queensland Child Protection Week 2023

We contributed \$29,000 to the work of the Queensland Child Protection Week Committee. Our contribution supported the statewide art project and creative workshops for children and their families. The QFCC-sponsored Regional Program Award was awarded to Youth Support Services at the Police Citizens Youth Club Aurukun, who provide support services to vulnerable young people, including early intervention responses to young people at-risk, and strengthening their relationships with their families and support networks.

Commissioner Twyford also travelled to Cairns during the week to attend the CREATE Foundation’s Queensland Child Protection Week event and spoke with the young consultants. QFCC staff also joined over 650 workers and leaders at the Child Protection Week dinner, an opportunity to celebrate the work across the sector to safeguard Queensland children. Commissioner Twyford also joined the fun at the CRQ’s Family Fun Day at Richlands.

Missing from Care Toolkit

On 20 May 2024, *Safe and Sound in Queensland: Enhancing safety for children who go missing from care* was launched. The QFCC partnered with Project Paradigm and PeakCare to create a toolkit for professionals and frontline workers supporting children in OOHC who go missing. The Commission contributed \$10,000 towards its development.

The guide for professionals provides suggested actions to take when young people in OOHC with go missing, including immediate steps to take, checklists, a risk assessment and safety planning.

The toolkit also includes a simple guide for young people with information on how to stay safe, where to get help, useful contacts, and facts about alcohol, drugs and sexual health. This toolkit was released alongside our *Absent from Care* paper (refer to page 32).

Day for Daniel

Ten QFCC staff joined community members committed to the prevention, identification and response to child sexual abuse at the Daniel Morcombe Foundation's Day for Daniel 2023. This community event is an opportunity to honour Daniel's memory through a 4km walk, the walk that Daniel was unable to complete. It also presents an opportunity for parents, carers, and educators to start a conversation with children and young people about personal safety.

Priorities

We will continue to advocate for Queensland children, young people and their families through our written submissions, providing evidence at hearings and inquiries and through our media and digital channels. Both Commissioners will continue to be highly active and visible in their public appearances and use social and corporate media channels to raise community awareness of key policy, program and practice issues impacting Queensland children and families.

OBJECTIVE THREE

3. Empowering children, young people and their families to influence decisions that affect their lives

We believe that all children, parents and caregivers have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. We deliver on our legislative functions by enabling and empowering children and families to tell their stories and raise their ideas and solutions. We empower children, young people and their families to influence decisions by:

- providing children and families with meaningful opportunities to influence systemic change and advocate for action
- assisting others to build their capacity to consult with and act on the views of children and young people
- increasing engagement by using communication approaches that children and young people prefer
- actively celebrating the achievements and contributions of young Queenslanders and their families.

This work is further informed by our explicit commitments to:

- highlight the voices, experiences and stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families as part of our business-as-usual approach
- highlight the voices, experience and stories of children and families whose rights have been breached.

Key achievements

“I was raised by a checklist” – Empowering young people in residential care to tell their stories

As part of our role in overseeing the Queensland Review of Residential Care, we sponsored a forum to hear from young people with lived experience of residential care. The forum provided a space for young people to share their ideas about the improvements needed for the residential care system and to engage in solutions-mapping discussions. The forum was facilitated by the Life Without Barriers’ program, Next Step Plus. Next Step Plus is a specialised program for young people transitioning from care. The program works with young people aged 15 to 25 years who are transitioning from OOHC and provides intensive support options in a youth-led approach.

The insights gained from this forum were presented in the *I was raised by a checklist* report, which captured young people’s views and experiences of the residential care system in Queensland. They spoke of their positive experiences including participating in activities, life skills training, some connection to culture and keeping safe at times. Additionally, participants mentioned that residential care was “better than being homeless” and that “having food” was another positive. When asked what needs to change, participants shared profound, poignant and informed solutions, including:

- more engagement with independent parties for young people to share their experiences in residential care and advise if they have any additional needs
- staff to have access to continuing training throughout their career
- two-way feedback with workers and the company – for young people to openly share their experiences in a productive, constructive approach.

QFCC Youth Summit

The inaugural QFCC Youth Summit was held in Brisbane on 10 and 11 April, 2024, as our way of honouring Queensland Youth Week. The summit amplified the lived experiences of young people aged under 25 years from across Queensland, providing a platform to voice ideas for positive change.

Thirty-eight young Queenslanders delivered compelling speeches on topics that are important to them to more than 200 attendees, including Queensland Ministers and community leaders. Charis Mullen MP opened the event, with heartfelt and considered reflection speeches delivered by Attorney-General Yvette D’Ath MP, Leeanne Enoch MP, Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Ivan Frkovic, Commissioner Twyford, Commissioner Lewis, Deputy Director-General Phillip Brooks, Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) Convenor Michael Hogan, and Q Shelter Capacity Lead and Board member Murray Benton.

Speaker sessions centred around wellbeing themes. Speeches included:

- Empowering child safety through cultural transformation: a personal journey
- From classroom to community: my journey in cultivating cultural leadership
- A gateway to a better nation: challenges in regional Australia
- How spending time with your family can reduce youth crime and create safer communities
- Fairness isn't giving everyone the same, it's giving people what they need.

Speakers travelled from as far as Longreach, Rockhampton, Cairns, St George, Horn Island, Umagico and Bamaga.

In May 2024, we published the QFCC Youth Summit Report⁵⁷.

Young Leaders Summit Cairns

In April, Commissioner Twyford and QFCC staff travelled to Cairns to host a Young Leaders Summit, a partnered initiative of the QFCC and the Australian School of Entrepreneurship. Over 300 young people participated in the event which focussed on leadership.

Commissioner Twyford joined the Leaders' Panel to share stories of how to dream big, maintain determination and strive toward attaining fulfilling employment that also helps people and builds the capacity of the community. Young attendees pitched their ideas for resolving issues surrounding the safety and wellbeing of young Queensland people. Ideas included using shipping containers to help resolve the housing crisis, extending the education opportunities to remote areas of Queensland and gamifying young people's experience with saving money in response to the increase in gambling among young people.

Parent Voice

In this nation leading work, we set out to better understand how the *Charter of Rights for parents* involved with the child protection system⁵⁸ is being upheld for Queensland parents and carers who have interacted with the Queensland child protection system. We undertook a first of its kind survey which asked parents and carers to provide their perspectives on system performance against the *Charter of Rights for parents*.

The joint project, undertaken with Micah Projects' Family Inclusion Network Southeast Queensland, received 324 responses from parents and carers, and provided new and important insights to help us understand the effectiveness of the system and will provide a baseline for future improvements.

This survey was also an opportunity to raise awareness of the *Charter of Rights for parents* among parents and families, and better understand their rights, including their right to be treated fairly, with respect and without discrimination, and to have their culture respected and understood.

Grape

In May 2023, we provided evidence to the Health and Environment Committee’s Vaping – An inquiry into reducing rates of e-cigarette use in Queensland, drawing on the views and experiences of young people we spoke with. In our submission, we advised Parliament that solutions for reducing e-cigarette used by young people would be more successful if youth-designed and youth-led.

Thereafter, the QFCC sponsored 13-year-old Queenslander, Aurora, to produce *Grape*, a youth-led film focussed on the negative impacts of vaping. The film explores e-cigarette use among young people, aiming to dispel the myth that vaping is harmless and highlight the implications of vaping addiction. It premiered on 5 July 2023 and a private screening held in Brisbane with key stakeholders.

The DoE has now adopted the film as part of their curriculum.

Youth Advocates

The QFCC Youth Advocates are young people casually employed to share their views and experiences to shape the work of the QFCC and stakeholders. Youth Advocates amplify the lived experiences, diversity, challenges and proposed solutions of young people. Their involvement in influencing government policies and initiatives ensures relevance, effectiveness and sustainability for all young people.

During the past year, the Youth Advocates were empowered and supported to participate in many opportunities to impact policies, projects and initiatives that directly impact their lives, their families and communities. In 2023–2024 we funded over 500 hours of youth participation across many programs of work including:

- informing several QFCC submissions to government, including the Putting Queensland Kids First submission
- sharing views as part of several consultations, including the Digital Inclusion Roundtable, Child Safe Standards, the QMHC’s Trauma Strategy and Respectful Relationships
- collaborating with other young people as part of the Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas Youth Advisory Committee
- writing QFCC Amplify Blogs
- participating in QFCC all-staff workshops
- speaking at events and conferences, including the 14th Annual Child Protection Liaison Officer and Child Protection Advisor Workshop
- contributing their perspectives to the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*
- participating in the Children’s Health Week Youth Summit.

Young Achiever Awards

Our sponsorship of the Young Achiever Awards is an opportunity to support young people's advocacy agendas and leadership journeys. We sponsored two awards to the value of \$24,690 in the following categories:

Contribution to Community or Family Safety Award – acknowledges a young person who is working towards protecting the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people, whilst demonstrating leadership in this space.

This award was presented to Aurora Iller who created, directed, produced, and starred in her short film *Grape* to discourage young people from vaping. Her work has been embraced by Queensland schools and has received global acclaim.

First Nations Youth Advocacy Award – celebrates young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders advocating for First Nations children and young people, their families and communities, in the areas of health and emotional wellbeing; safety and home environment; learning and skills and economic empowerment; and/or culture and connection.

This award was presented to Daniel Rosendale, the co-founder of DIYDG. Daniel brings leadership, education, and health initiatives to young Indigenous people.

Statutory systems workforce survey 2023

Since 2018 the QFCC has surveyed the broader Queensland community, as well as the child protection, youth justice and family support workforces to understand how the system's services are being delivered and received. Findings from these surveys produce evidence to inform system reviews, strategic policy, advocacy and system monitoring and performance reporting. The evidence is promoted externally and provides important information for decision-makers about whether systems are meeting set objectives.

This survey provides an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the capacity and capability of the workforce to provide support to children, young people and their families. In 2023, 575 respondents were surveyed including 292 from government agencies (51%) and 283 from non-government organisations (49%)⁵⁹.

We had an overwhelming response regarding learning and development priorities for the child protection, family support and youth justice sectors, including a call for additional specialist training (i.e. DFV, trauma-informed practice, alcohol and drug use, mental health) and additional skills and, and tools for engaging clients (i.e. interpersonal and interviewing skills).

Respondents told us about positive action being taken in the sector, including an overwhelming majority of their organisations (76%) partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families and communities.

Community perceptions survey 2023

More than 3100 Queensland adults responded to the survey, providing their perspectives on the systems that support children and young people and how that system upholds their rights. The survey results highlighted a decrease in the community's confidence in the child protection system and raised concerns about access to mental health services.

Respondents shared concerns about how the cost of living was having a negative impact on children, young people and families. Frontline child protection and family support workers called for greater workforce support (35%) while frontline youth justice staff advocated for an expansion of early intervention services (20%), followed closely by additional funding and resources.

Priorities

In the coming year, we will continue to empower children, young people and their families, including QFCC Youth Advocates, by embedding their lived experiences and perspectives in our advocacy and oversight work, and by providing support to enable their voices to be heard in public forums, including Parliament, conferences, panels, through social and media channels and as part of panels. Supporting young people to influence positive change and embedding their voices into the work of the QFCC and the broader policy landscape will continue to be a priority. We plan to publish the inaugural *QFCC Workforce and Community Trend Report* in the coming year, including a five-year trend report which will expand our evidence base and allow us to continue building an evidence base in relation to the identification of trends, emerging issues and systemic insights to inform advocacy and oversight.

OBJECTIVE FOUR

4. Supporting, connecting and collaborating with organisations that advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children

Improving child and family wellbeing throughout Queensland requires focus and effort that reaches across individual systems and portfolios. Stakeholders must work collaboratively to ensure a comprehensive and coherent approach to legislation, policy, funding and service delivery that benefits Queensland's children and families.

We have a unique position that can bring together diverse voices to contribute to key issues that impact on the wellbeing of children and their families. We work with other statutory agencies, peak bodies and our jurisdictional counterparts to achieve common outcomes and collective benefits. By employing a collaborative approach, we can maximise our impact and assist others to achieve common goals. We support, connect and collaborate with organisations by:

- extending our visibility and influence to shape child-related laws, policies, programs and systems
- driving collaboration and coordination by bringing stakeholders together, and co-designing shared approaches
- engaging with service providers and community groups to enhance our understanding, oversight and influence
- publishing an advocacy agenda that engages partners in our work, in order to deliver shared goals.

This work is further informed by our explicit commitments to:

- consult with the appropriate cultural authority, at each stage of research, development and production, when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families
- build a culture of everyday accountability for the rights of children and young people across government portfolios
- translate child rights principles into practice guidance for other organisations.

Key achievements

In 2023–2024, we have invested significant financial and human resources in building a coalition of like-minded government and non-government organisations and agencies to improve the system for Queensland children, young people and families.

First Nations Queensland Consultative Body engagement and consultation project

We were commissioned by DoE to lead the First Nations Queensland Consultative Body engagement and consultation project. This project was undertaken to inform the establishment of an independent, community-led, and managed Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Education, Education and Training Consultative Body.

Recognising the importance of empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead these conversations within community, we funded 19 organisations including ATSICCOs from around Queensland to host consultations, workshops, and interviews within their communities and provide reports back on the experiences and aspirations of First Nations students and what communities hoped to see from a Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early childhood, Education and Training Consultative Body.

The organisations that participated had already established trusting relationships within their communities and were able to draw on these existing connections to ensure that consultations were undertaken in an environment that was culturally safe and inclusive and enabled community to participate in genuine truth-telling. This also gave the opportunity for organisations to provide place-based examples of initiatives that were already in place to support First Nations students and how these worked in a practical sense.

The breadth of locations visited was extensive, and included:

- Rockhampton
- Moa Island
- Mount Isa
- Roma
- Groote Eylandt
- Edmonton
- Cairns (including Mooroolool)
- Cape York
- Bamaga
- Karumba
- Horn Island
- Townsville
- Hervey Bay
- Greater Brisbane region
- Cloncurry
- Emerald
- Palm Island
- Cairns
- Darnley Island
- Toowoomba
- Gold Coast (including Currumbin, Varsity Lakes and Robina)
- Kubin Village
- Bundaberg
- Yarrabah
- Kingaroy
- Cherbourg
- Thursday Island

More than 800 First Nations participants were engaged through these partnerships including children, young people, parents, guardians, First Nations staff, Elders, and community members.

Additionally, a 98 per cent completion rate was observed for the online survey which included:

- 136 participants aged 10 to 17 years
- 57 participants aged 18–24 years
- 224 parents and guardians.

Participating organisations reported that the process of funding individual organisations to conduct community consultations created a safer and more trusting environment which enabled them to collect rich data and experiences from participants which otherwise may not have been shared in the presence of people that they were not familiar with and that were not from the community.

We heard that schooling is valued within all communities. We heard the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in schools, and that sport provides extrinsic motivation for young people. We also learnt about what is not currently working, including a lack of further education and employment opportunities in rural and remote areas, and a lack of trauma-informed practices being used by teachers. Challenges regarding school attendance, teacher cultural competencies, support for English as a Second Language and bullying were also shared.

Listening and learning

The report, *Listening and Learning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*,⁶⁰ brings together the experiences, knowledge and perspectives of First nations children, young people, their families and communities regarding opportunities for a Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood, Education and Training Consultative Body (Consultative Body) to provide a mechanism for representation of children, young people and their families to address system-issues. The Consultative Body will be eligible for membership of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Council represent First Nations people nationally and at the state-level on education matters.

Young people told us that their education needs to include and value First Nations students and foster cultural connection between students and where they access education. To move forward, First Nations communities need an ongoing voice to education providers and pathways for greater community control over their children's educations.

QFCC Government Reference Panel

Our oversight work is supported by collaborative stakeholder relationships. The systems we provide oversight of are complex and multifaceted and there are many experts across Queensland working to reduce risks to children. We value the expertise of others and proactively seek to work with stakeholders undertaking related initiatives. We know that our ability to achieve positive change relies on the input, attention and action of our stakeholders.

To enhance the effectiveness of our workplan and to ensure the priority projects identified avoid duplication of other work undertaken across government, the QFCC Government Reference Panel has been established. This panel is made up of representatives from key

government agencies who provide and can make decisions on projects related to the workplan.

Thriving Kids Strategic Framing Initiative

A partnership between the QFCC and TQKP, the Thriving Kids Strategic Framing Initiative aims to catalyse systems to change the odds for Queensland children and young people and enable them to thrive by shifting mindsets, understandings and capabilities about child and adolescent health and wellbeing.

The initiative intends to build on the TQKP Core Story which aims to build connections, capabilities and capacities to embed the use of science and evidence-based framing of messages and communications as common practice. Evidence suggests that this could make a significant difference in how people think about, support and enact policies, programs and practices that support children to thrive.

As part of this collaboration, we partnered with Micah Projects and Common Ground Queensland to hold a two-day event for participants to work through the application of framing recommendations and discuss key challenges and opportunities in a variety of contexts focussed on improving outcomes for young people and early childhood in Queensland.

The outcomes will enable caregivers and communities to use evidence-based methods and language from child development and communication experts to facilitate the healthy development of children and young people. The project will continue in 2024–2025.

Hymba Yumba's year 13 trial

We were proud to fund Hymba Yumba Independent School to implement the first year of its innovative year 13 program. The program supports students as they transition from school into their chosen education, training and employment pathways. The program is the first of its kind for First Nations students and their families in Queensland and could be the benchmark for future implementation across Queensland schools. It was initiated by the staff at Hymba Yumba who are passionate about reimagining post-school pathways for its students. The year 13 program offers support from the familiar school community to students who have recently completed year 12, and provides opportunities to develop work readiness, build resilience and positively adapt to change.

The year 13 program aims to make the transition to life beyond school smoother for its First Nations students, who can find the transition challenging due to the social, cultural, economic and educational challenges it presents. We are supporting Hymba Yumba to evaluate the first year of the initiative and to use this data and evidence as the basis for additional funding from other sources. It was an incredible opportunity for us to advocate for First Nations children, and to support their higher education and employment pathways.

Child Rights dialogues

To explore the value and practical application of the UNCRC across different contexts, we have hosted a series of Child Rights dialogues. The first dialogue in this series, held in June 2023,

focussed on applying child rights in decision-making involving children and young people in conflict with the law.

On 24 August we hosted the second dialogue focussed on the release of the *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*. The event was well attended with participants hearing directly from child rights experts Professor John Tobin, from the University of Melbourne, and James McDougall, co-convenor of Australian Child Rights Taskforce, along with Commissioner Lewis and QFCC staff.

Framing of child rights

We provided 54 Reasons (Save the Children Australia) with \$20,000 to engage Frameworks Institute to undertake research on the framing of child rights. The project aims to build a sector story that establishes what needs to be communicated about child rights. This will be achieved through interviews and listening sessions with key stakeholders, an environmental scan and narrative scan to determine the current narrative and wider public discourse relating to child rights. This work will continue in 2024–2025 and culminate in a research report.

Seeking and sharing insights on child deaths

As custodian of the Child Death Register, we share our data and expertise to learn from children's deaths and improve the safety and wellbeing of all Queensland children. Using data and insights from our register, we work with stakeholders and advisory groups to improve reporting systems and advocate for child death prevention activities.

In 2023–2024, we worked with:

- Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention Group (ANZCDR&PG)
- Australian National Child Death Data Collection Working Group
- Consumer Product Injury Research Advisory Group
- Queensland Government Births and Deaths Working Group
- Queensland Suicide Prevention Network
- Queensland Paediatric Quality Council Steering Committee
- Queensland Paediatric Quality Council Infant Mortality Sub-committee
- Road Safety Research Network
- Genetic Testing in SUDI SUDC Working Group
- Queensland Trauma Strategy Expert Advisory Committee
- Shifting Minds Strategic Leadership Group.

We used data from the register to inform the development and strengthening of Australian product standards and regulations, including:

- potential hazards in the design, use and inappropriate use of cots, portacots and other infant sleep devices – for consideration of a review of the Australian cot and portacot standard
- clothing-related hazards for infants and young children including concerns regarding swaddle suits
- caustic ingestion fatalities from household cleaning products.

Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention Group

This financial year we continued to play a national leadership role convening the ANZCDR&PG. This group is a collaboration of all state and territory child death review teams across Australia and New Zealand. It was established to develop nationally and internationally comparable child death statistics, to better understand and prevent child deaths.

Reflecting our national leadership, we published the *Australian Child Death Statistics 2021*⁶¹ report, with information on child mortality across all eight Australian jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction has individual legislative bases, differing functions and reporting requirements, and as such, the preparation of the report aims to develop national and international comparable child death statistics to improve sector understanding and prevent child deaths. This report provides the only national compilation of data of infant deaths from SIDS and undetermined causes, a key area of focus for all jurisdictions.

On 14 May 2024, we hosted the ANZCDR&PG Conference. The conference was a professional development opportunity for people working in child death prevention, registration, review, policy and research. Global expert presenters presented to more than 150 professionals from the child death review, coronial, criminal justice, child protection and medical fields on how data and death classifications can be better used to deepen our understanding of risk factors around child death and strengthen prevention strategies.

Global expert presenters led discussions on a broad range of topics including:

- research in early childhood predictors of adolescent suicidality
- the Australian Youth Self-harm Atlas
- vicarious trauma in the workplace
- the Queensland Paediatric Sepsis Study
- clinical critical incident review process and findings
- genome testing in child death review and prevention
- DFV
- characteristics of recommendations from child death reviews.

Australian and New Zealand Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates

- Across 2023, Commissioner Twyford chaired and coordinated the Australian and New Zealand Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates (ANZCCGA) meetings. The group presents an opportunity for members to raise their collective voices to promote the safety, wellbeing and rights of children and young people in Australia and New Zealand and advocate for systemic improvements. It also provides an opportunity for Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates from across Australia to connect and discuss emerging issues and share learnings from recent reforms and projects.
- During the July 2023 meeting, members discussed the jurisdictional differences in definitions and monitoring of separation or isolation in youth detention, with further work underway to consider a nationally consistent standard or position on its use. In September 2023, Commissioner Twyford and Commissioner Lewis travelled to Larrakia Country (Darwin) to co-chair the meeting which focussed on youth detention and The Voice referendum. The February 2024 meeting held in Hobart, Tasmania, was the last to be hosted by the QFCC and saw the ratification of the Isolation in Youth Detention joint statement.⁶²

First Nations Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates

In 2023–2024, the Australian First Nations Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates Caucus met quarterly to progress the priority areas identified in 2023. During the year there was a focus on the implementation of a nationally consistent approach to monitoring over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection and youth justice systems using Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles.

Funding and sponsorship agreements

We have a unique position that can bring together diverse voices to contribute to key issues that impact the wellbeing of children and their families. We work with other statutory agencies, peak bodies, non-government organisations and our counterparts in other jurisdictions to achieve common outcomes and create collective impact.

This is why in 2023–2024, we invested \$982,000 to support the work of our key partners. These included:

- \$150,000 to deliver the Young, Black & Proud Scholarships in partnership with ATSICHS to support and celebrate the talents and strengths of young First Nations children and young people who may lack the support and resources to reach their full potential
- \$166,000 to CRQ to deliver a public campaign promoting children’s rights, including Children’s Week, designed to celebrate the rights of Queensland children and celebrate their talents, skills and abilities
- \$121,000 to the Daniel Morcombe Foundation for the e-kidna Group to develop and promote advocacy and community education regarding prevention of and recovery from child sexual abuse

- \$96,000 to DIYDG for the Growing Our Way initiative
- \$62,000 for two Young Achiever Awards (First Nations Youth Advocacy Award and Contribution to Community or Family Safety Award) and one Community Achievement Award
- \$60,000 to support Play Matters Australia to deliver the Messy Play Matters initiative
- \$54,335 to sponsor the CREATE Foundation art competitions for children in OOH.

Young, Black & Proud Scholarships

The Young, Black & Proud Scholarships were launched by ATSICHS Brisbane to support and celebrate the talents and strengths of young First Nations people who exhibit outstanding promise but may lack the support and resources to reach their full potential.

Since their inception in 2018, we have sponsored the scholarships which are designed to support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to pursue their artistic, sporting and academic potential. For the first time, participants in the extended catchment areas of South East Queensland and the Torres Strait could apply for a scholarship worth \$1000 or \$2000.

To be eligible, applicants must be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 25 years or younger, live in Queensland, require support with school, university, arts, or sporting.

In 2023–2024, we invested \$150,000 in this sponsorship, enabling us to; strengthen and support young people’s development and skills; contribute to the development and career paths for young people; and capture and share young people’s success stories. Recipients used their scholarships for a range of purposes including travelling to sporting competitions, paying for classes and school fees, and purchasing art supplies, textbooks and uniforms. A group scholarship was awarded to Torres Strait Kaziw Meta Dance Team to fund their cultural trip to Hobart.

We will continue to sponsor the Young, Black & Proud Scholarships in 2024–2025. As part of the government’s 2024–2025 Budget announcement, an additional \$200,000 has been committed to expand this important scholarship program.

Queensland Community Achievement Awards

The Queensland Community Achievement Awards, facilitated by Awards Australia, is a statewide awards program aimed at encouraging, acknowledging and rewarding the valuable contributions that individuals, communities and businesses are making throughout Queensland.

This year, the QFCC’s Dedicated to Supporting Young Queenslanders Award was presented to Care Kits for Kids who have distributed over 7100 care kits filled with essentials to young people aged 0–17 years. The team’s unwavering mission is to ensure every Queensland child in need receives a care kit, creating a lasting positive impact and sense of community support.

Children's Week Awards

The Children's Week Awards program aims to celebrate and honour the outstanding contributions, initiatives, and advocacy undertaken by young people and organisations. The awards program aims to recognise and champion people who are making significant contributions to promoting the rights of children.

Announced as part of the Children's Week Launch and Awards celebrations, the QFCC Commissioners' Award for Community Engagement was awarded to Hyanho Moser, CEO of the Australian Institute of Play and Logan advocate for children's right to play.

CREATE Foundation Art Awards

CREATE Foundation provides art showcases for children in OOHC. These events aim to engage with young people that are cared for outside of the families they were born into. Supporting young people to be creative and inspire personal expression supports the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. This initiative aims to encourage children and young people in OOHC to participate in group activities and to be celebrated for their achievements.

On 19 January, Commissioner Twyford presented awards at the QFCC-sponsored CREATE Foundation Art Awards, which showcased the talented works of Queensland children living in OOHC. The competition categories were 'Reflections of a child or young person's experience in care', 'Having a voice', 'Hopes and dreams for the future' and 'First Nations special category'. The artwork was featured in the *Growing Up in Queensland* report.

Advice and leadership

Our Commissioners provide leadership and expert advice on issues impacting Queensland children, young people and families through their membership on state and national committees and advisory groups. Our active engagement and contribution to these groups extends our visibility and influence to shape child-related laws, policies, programs, practices and systems.

Commissioner Twyford holds chair responsibilities and memberships on a number of boards and committees to connect with sector stakeholders and drive systemic change. These boards and committees include:

- ANZCCGA meeting (rotating chair)
- Child Death Review Board (led by QFCC)
- Crime Reference Committee Meeting (led by Crime and Corruption Commission)
- Wacol Remand Centre Operational Model (led by DYJ)
- Youth Justice Oversight Stakeholder Meeting (led by DYJ).

Commissioner Lewis connects with leaders and experts to design and advocate for initiatives that address systemic inequities and embed meaningful involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on policies, programs and services chairs, and to advance the rights of

children. She chairs or holds membership of several key committees and advisory groups, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Services – Strategic Implementation Group (led by DCSSDS)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (led by SNAICC)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander System Leadership Working Group (led by Queensland Leadership Group)
- Accountability and Data Working Group (co-led by Department of Social Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group)
- Australian Child Rights Taskforce (led by UNICEF Australia)
- Australian Child Rights Taskforce Policy Working Group (led by UNICEF Australia)
- Community Services Ministers Meeting (led by SNAICC)
- Cultural Agency Leaders meeting (led by Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (DTATSIPCA))
- First Nations Ambassadors for Change (led by Public Sector Commission)
- First Nations Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocate Caucus (rotating chair)
- Implementation Coordination Committee (Implementation Advisory Group and Leadership Group) (led by Department of Social Services (led by Department of Social Services))
- Implementation Oversight Group meeting for Safe children and strong communities project (led by DJAG)
- Justice Policy Partnership Executive Governance Group Meeting (led by DJAG)
- Mount Isa Lead Health Management Committee Meeting (led by Queensland Health)
- National Strategic Partnership on Child Sexual Exploitation (co-led by University of New South Wales and IFYS)
- QPS Domestic and Family Violence Advisory Group Meeting (led by QPS)
- Safe and Supported Shared Decision Making Committee (led by Department of Social Services)
- Senior Oversight Committee (co-led by SNAICC and Queensland Children and Families Secretaries).

QFCC representatives further contribute to committees and sector groups, including:

- ANZCDR&PG (currently led by QFCC)
- Breaking Cycles Interagency Strategic Working Group (led by DCSSDS)
- Child Safety Parent Survey Working Group (led by DCSSDS)
- Children’s Health Collaborative – South East Meeting (led by CHQ)

4. Supporting, connecting and collaborating

- Childrens Court Committee (led by DYJ)
- Consumer Product Injury Research Advisory Group (led by the Office of Fair Trading)
- Crisis Communication Network (led by DPC)
- Culture and Reconciliation Working Group (led by DTATSIPCA)
- First Nations Education Consultative Body project (led by DoE)
- Heads of Communications (led by DPC)
- Interim Victim's Commissioner Stakeholder Reference Group (led by DJAG)
- Justice Policy Partnership Cross-agency Working Group (led by DJAG)
- Leading Women's Network (led by QPS)
- Licensing Muster Working Group – Closing the Gap on incarceration rates (co-led by DJAG and First Nations Justice)
- Office for Youth (led by Office for Youth)
- Policy Futures Graduate Program (led by DPC)
- Queensland Child Protection Week Working Committee (led by Queensland Child Protection Week)
- Queensland First Children and Families Board (led by DCSSDS)
- Queensland Paediatric Quality Council Steering Committee meeting (led by Queensland Paediatric Quality Council)
- Queensland Raise the Age Leadership Group Meeting (led by Queensland Council of Social Services)
- REDCap Project (co-led by Queensland Health and QFCC)
- Shifting Minds Strategic Leadership Group (led by QMHC)
- Suicide Prevention Plan Cross-Agency Working Group (led by QMHC)
- TQKP Strategic Framing Project Community of Practice (led by TQKP)
- TQKP Strategic Framing Project Sponsors Group Meeting (led by TQKP)
- Trauma-Informed Workforces and Workplaces Deep Dive (led by QMHC)
- Whole-of-government Social Media Sub-Committee Meeting (led by DPC)
- Whole-of-government Queensland Child Protection Week Sponsorship Group Meeting (led by DTATSIPCA)
- Whole-of-government Queensland Child Protection Week Awards Meeting (led by DTATSIPCA)
- Youth Crime Taskforce Operational Leadership Group (led by DYJ).

Corporate Administration Agency

Corporate Administration Agency (CAA) provides specialist, shared corporate services to statutory authorities and small to medium government agencies. In 2023–2024, we invested \$481,000 in our arrangement with CAA, to increase our capability and capacity across a range of corporate areas including Information and Communication Technology, large procurement projects, human resources and finance processes as well as limited human resource consultation.

Priorities

Moving forward, we will continue to bring together diverse voices to contribute to key issues that impact the wellbeing of children and their families. Working with other agencies, peak bodies and our counterparts in other jurisdictions to achieve common outcomes and collective benefits will remain an ongoing priority for the QFCC. This will allow us to maximise our impact and assist others to achieve common goals. Nurturing these existing partnerships and establishing new key stakeholder relationships best placed to support us in our work remains a key method in achieving our strategic priorities.

OBJECTIVE FIVE

5. Building our capacity, capability and culture to achieve our vision

To grow our influence, we maintain a culture of continuous improvement by making ongoing improvements to our performance, processes, governance and internal systems, with the aim of achieving operational excellence.

We build our capacity, capability and culture by:

- investing in the development, wellbeing and capability of our staff
- continuously improving our organisational governance, systems, structures and processes
- implementing a strategic workforce plan that enables us to attract, retain and develop a skilled, diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the community we serve
- integrating our operations to improve efficiency and streamline practices
- enhancing our internal and external communication to ensure we consistently and comprehensively share our achievements and demonstrate our value.

This work is further informed by our explicit commitments to:

- actively seek to increase our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce across all functional areas
- strengthen our organisational culture by embedding approaches that help staff partner with, and respond to the views and voices of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- build expertise in child rights through our recruitment, orientation, development and training practices
- provide leadership in rights-affirming practice and adherence to our obligations under the *Human Rights Act 2019*.

Our corporate performance

In the last financial year we had two service area objectives in the Queensland State Budget 2023–2024 Service Delivery Statements (SDS, see Table 5) to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and the role of families and communities in protecting and caring for them.

The QFCC has four SDS service standards, with the majority positively exceeding 2023–2024 target estimates:

5. Building capacity, capability and culture

1. the percentage of surveyed stakeholders that feel the QFCC contributes to improving the child protection and youth justice systems achieved 100 per cent satisfaction against a target of 80 per cent
2. expenditure per young Queenslander was calculated to be \$10.52 against a target of \$10.00 (target not met)
3. for the Child Death Review Board secretariat, the average time taken to review final internal agency review reports once received was 4.1 months against a target of six months
4. the average cost per review of child death case received was \$19,643 against a target of \$20,000.

Table 5: QFCC 2023–2024 Service standard statements

QFCC service standard	Notes	2023–2024 target	2023–2024 actual
Effectiveness measure Percentage of surveyed stakeholders that feel the QFCC contributes to improving the child protection and youth justice systems	1	80%	100%
Efficiency measure QFCC expenditure per young Queenslander		\$10.00	\$10.52
Child Death Review Board service standard		2023–2024 target	2023–2024 actual
Effectiveness measure Average time taken to review final internal agency review reports once received (months)	2	6	4.1
Efficiency measure Average cost per review of child death case received		\$20,000	\$19,493
Notes:			
1. The variance between the 2023–2024 Target/Estimate and the 2023–2024 Estimated Actual was influenced by heightened engagement and collaboration with stakeholders being reflected in survey results. The 2024–25 Target/Estimate has been retained at 80 per cent to reflect the diversity of stakeholders and viewpoints on new and emerging issues.			
2. The variance between the 2023–2024 Target/Estimate and the 2023–2024 Estimated Actual is due primarily to a change in methodology and review processes, which enabled less-complex cases to be reviewed more quickly. This improvement in efficiency enabled additional time to be devoted to review of more complex cases within the target timeframe.			

External scrutiny

Pursuant to the Queensland Legislative Assembly Standing Rules and Orders, the CSLAC of Parliament has responsibility to:

- monitor and review the performance by the entity of the entity's functions
- report to the Legislative Assembly on any matter concerning the entity, the entity's functions or the performance of the entity's functions that the Committee considers should be drawn to the Legislative Assembly's attention
- examine the annual report of the entity tabled in the Legislative Assembly and, if appropriate, comment on any aspect of the report
- report to the Legislative Assembly any changes to the functions, structures and procedures of the entity that the Committee considers desirable for the more effective operation of the entity or the Act which establishes the entity.

On 2 February 2024, the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee¹ tabled its report on the *Oversight of the Queensland Family and Child Commission*. In its report, the Committee:

- commended the QFCC for its continuous and impressive volume of work in raising awareness, research and advocacy regarding matters concerning Queensland children, young people, and their families
- acknowledged the QFCC's good work in relation to its new strategic plan, governance model, internal policies, and procedures
- was pleased to see the QFCC's continuing work to understand and research the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland's statutory systems.

On 29 April 2024, the CSLAC held a public hearing on the oversight of the QFCC. The Committee report resulting from this appearance will be released in 2024–2025.

Building cultural capability

The QFCC *Reframing the Relationship Plan 2024–2027* was developed to support the Commission in our commitment to implement components of the *Reframing the Relationship Plan* requirements under sections 19–23 of the *Public Sector Act 2022*. The plan will support the enhancement and continuation of building our cultural capability to enable provision of advice to the government and deliver impactful services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. To drive the development of the plan, the QFCC Reframing the Relationship Working Group was established in September 2023. The working group met weekly to collate feedback and data from an all-staff workshop, then undertook an internal consultation process. Part of this plan was designed to be a living document and will support the strengthening of our cultural capability as a necessary foundation to the pillars of Voice, Treaty

¹ The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee ceased to exist on 13 February 2024 and its portfolio responsibilities were transferred to the Community Support and Legal Affairs Committee (CSLAC).

and Truth, and act as a vehicle to generate an approach that will be embedded into everything we do.

As a continuation of our approach to Reframing the Relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, QFCC staff and colleagues from the OPG, Queensland Human Rights Commission and the QMHC, were invited to a screening of *The Last Daughter*⁶³ followed by a Q&A session with the writer, Brenda Matthews.

This year's National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) theme, 'For Our Elders', focussed on thanking and paying respect to Elders who have led, struggled and guided with their knowledge and experience. We provided a total of almost \$9,000 to help fund several community-led NAIDOC events. QFCC staff also provided in-kind support by assisting with event logistics and engaging with the community.

Internal improvement projects

Following the Independent Review of the QFCC and the Internal review of the implementation of the interim structure, it was agreed that the Corporate Services team would initiate new ways of working to improve the quality of corporate support services, addressing key issues including staff career pathways and team dependency. A Service Level Agreement between the QFCC and CAA for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026 was approved in July 2023.

Several initiatives have been delivered in collaboration with CAA this year, including:

- implementing an Aurion-based onboarding module for new starters, replacing the existing manual process
- automating some commonly used HR forms
- rolling out ExpenseMe Pro, an expense management solution to support Corporate Card reconciliation and expense management
- deploying an online version of our Performance Development Plan within our online training platform.

Innovating our data presentations with digital dashboards

We leveraged the capabilities of PowerBI to communicate data findings for two distinct projects in 2023–2024. These dashboards enabled access to timely data, stronger collaboration, transparency, and decision-making across the systems we collectively engage with, to support children, young people and their families.

The first of its kind in Queensland, Data Explorer, a go-to resource that presents a holistic picture of child and family wellbeing in Queensland, evolved from our *Growing Up in Queensland Report*. It is a rich and extensive data source that reports on the wellbeing of Queensland children, young people and families.

The data and case studies map to the wellbeing framework developed by ARACY, which sets out the six interconnected factors children and families need to thrive: feeling valued, loved and safe; having material basics; being healthy; being engaged in education; participating in

their communities; and having a positive sense of identity and culture. The data is represented at both regional and state level, and sourced from government departments, non-government organisations and researchers.

Supporting the Child Death Review Board

Since July 2020, the Commission has hosted the Board, which undertakes a system review following the death of a child in the child protection system. The Board works to keep systems accountable by making recommendations to government and non-government agencies about legislative, policy and practice improvements.

In 2023–2024, the Board met six times to discuss child death reviews and invited researchers and experts to share contemporary advice and best practice on issues affecting Queensland children and families. Commissioner Twyford chairs the Board and QFCC staff the role of Secretariat.

This past year the Board commenced using a collective review approach for its review work in which cases that demonstrate a particular system issue/s are considered together. This approach gives added weight to demonstrating the existence and impact of a system issue, as well as allowing for more cases to be considered within one collective review.

The Chair exercised legislative powers (section 29P of the Act) to request and receive information from non-government agencies on three occasions about seeking further details about the services they provided to children and or their families to inform the Board's reviews.

Board members are appointed for a term of three years. With several Board members' terms concluding on 30 June 2023, we partnered with the DJAG between January and June 2023 to undertake a significant recruitment process. There was a strong aspiration to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership on the Board. We led a digital and media campaign to encourage applications from across Queensland and provided advice to DJAG to support assessment of applicants' expertise and knowledge.

Legislative reform in 2024–2025

Section 42 of the Act requires government to review the effectiveness of the Act as soon as practicable after five years. In 2023 government initiated this review, with external parties asked to respond to a discussion paper. In March 2023 we made our submission to the government's review of the Act. Our submission is publicly available on our website.

We called for government to:

- establish a dedicated, independent, appropriately empowered and resourced Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- establish compatible powers for both Commissioners to exercise in the performance of QFCC functions

- add a more explicit role for the Commission to ‘promote the rights of children and young people’
- add a new objective to ‘promote the rights, development, wellbeing and best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people’
- add new functions to ‘promote a culture of accountability for upholding the rights of children and young people in Queensland’ and ‘promote the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions that affect their lives’
- enable the QFCC to provide leadership for e-safety within Queensland
- establish a Reportable Conduct Scheme (RCS) as recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission)
- establish a child safety scheme as recommended by the Royal Commission.

There has been no formal communication about the progress of the review of the Act, however, in 2024 government reconfirmed that it was committed to establishing a First Nations Children’s Commissioner and on 12 June 2024, a Bill was introduced in Parliament that when passed, will see the QFCC become legally responsible for the establishment and administration of a Child Safe Organisation System in Queensland.

The Child Safe Organisation System will consist of the mandatory implementation of Child Safe Standards and the establishment of a nationally consistent RCS for Queensland. The development of the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* (National Principles) is a key national reform in response to these recommendations made by the Royal Commission. We have been working closely with DCSSDS and DJAG on this Bill and the government has confirmed a significant funding boost for us to operate as the oversight body for Queensland’s Child Safe Organisations system, with the funding to be released upon passage of legislation in Parliament. This is an exciting development, demonstrating the faith that the government has in our specialist abilities and reinforces that we are a trusted statutory body. The focus for the 2024–2025 year will be the establishment of the Commission as the oversight body.

Oversight framework

In July 2023, we released the *2023–2027 Oversight Framework* and *2023–2024 Oversight Forward Workplan*. These documents contain our clear commitment to performing our functions with transparency and objectivity. The framework provides clarity about how the QFCC undertakes its key statutory functions under section 9 of the Act to review and improve the systems that protect and safeguard Queensland children and their families.

It articulates how we will deliver reviews, audits and evaluations that influence positive change.

Following consultation with stakeholders, a review was undertaken, resulting in the *2024 Oversight Forward Workplan*. This workplan replaces the *2023–2024 Oversight Forward Workplan*, and in doing such:

- removed six completed projects

- removed three projects that were duplicating work being conducted by other agencies
- added six new projects scheduled for completion in 2024.

The Framework articulates the model, principles and methodologies we apply to our systemic oversight work. It provides an explanation of how our approach produces objective analysis to identify changes to laws, policies, programs and services that can improve outcomes for Queensland children and their families, as required under our legislation. The Framework makes a strong commitment to involving the community, sector and government in assisting us to design, undertake and promote our oversight work. We recognise that achieving positive change relies on the input, attention and action of our stakeholders.

Our Forward Workplan outlines the areas of concern we intend to monitor and review in the coming years. We will report every six months on the progress of our Workplan and will seek input and guidance from stakeholders on emerging issues that may reshape our priorities.

Our people

As of 28 June 2024, our workforce is comprised 65.68 FTE staff with a total staff headcount of 80. Several Youth Advocates were also employed on a casual basis. Our total employee expenses for 2023–2024 was \$9.5 million.

As a micro-agency with less than 100 employees, we experience the benefits and challenges of a small organisation. Each employee represents 1.5 per cent of our workforce, meaning individual absences, vacancies and performance can profoundly impact the organisation. It also means that each employee's individual contribution is significant in both size and impact. Our passionate employees come from a wide range of professional backgrounds – academia, law, media and communications, frontline youth justice, frontline child protection, clinical nursing, non-government organisations and advocacy.

Our size and scale places pressure on many functions, staffed by one or two experts, whose broad responsibilities would be covered by several employees in a typical department. In addition, the nature of our review and evaluation work lends itself to project-focussed work, which is time-intensive and requires significant resourcing and attention. Staff often take opportunities with larger departments, with 24 staff taking external secondments over the past three years. While the breadth of knowledge returned to the Commission is of great value, the short-term challenges are felt across teams. We are required to balance this with our child death-related work, which is highly sensitive in nature and content, and has the potential to significantly impact staff wellbeing, while also having our finger on the pulse of evolving policy and sector reform and supporting children and young people to have their voices heard. This means that our workforce and leadership is constantly evolving and adjusting to ensure that we continue to be well-placed to influence change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families.

We have increased our focus on the psychosocial wellbeing of our employees, delivering vicarious trauma training sessions to all staff, and increasing our range of services around employee wellbeing check-ins, individual and group supervision. We are also updating our

recruitment documents and corporate policies to better inform prospective employees and partners of the work that we do and the potential for trauma responses to arise.

Workforce statistics at 30 June 2024

Our workforce is employed under the *Public Sector Act 2022*, except for the Principal Commissioner and Commissioner, who are employed under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*.

At this time, our workforce included 65.68 FTE with a total headcount of 80, and was comprised of:

- 75.03 per cent frontline and frontline support and 24.97 per cent corporate (occupation type by FTE)
- 74.44 per cent permanent, 17.36 per cent temporary, 0.59 per cent casual and 7.61 per cent contract (appointment type by FTE)
- 72.50 per cent full-time, 15.00 per cent part-time and 12.50 per cent casual (employment by headcount).

The average tenure of permanent staff was 5.1 years, with more than 25 per cent of all staff having committed more than five years to the work of the QFCC. Nine staff were at the QFCC since its establishment on 1 July 2014 and 58 per cent of our workforce had more than 12-months of service with the QFCC. Our staff demographics are outlined in Table 6, Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 6: QFCC staff demographics as at 30 June 2024 – Gender

Gender	Number (Headcount)	Percentage of total workforce (calculated on headcount)
Woman	63	78.75%
Man	17	21.25%
Non-binary	0	0.00%

Table 7: QFCC staff demographics as at 30 June 2024 – Diversity groups

Diversity groups	Number (Headcount)	Percentage of total workforce (calculated on headcount)
Woman	63	78.75%
Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples	< 5*	
People with disability	< 5*	
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse – Speak a language at home other than English [^]	< 5*	
*To ensure privacy, in tables where there are less than 5 respondents in a category, specific numbers should be replaced by < 5		

^ This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages or Australian South Sea Islander languages spoken at home.

Table 8: QFCC staff demographics as at 30 June 2024 – Target group data for Women in Leadership Roles

	Women (Headcount)	Women as percentage of total leadership cohort (calculated on headcount)
Senior Officers (Classified, s122 and s155 combined)	2	66.67%
Senior Executive Service and Chief Executives (Classified, s122 and s155 combined)	3	60.00%

Over the past 12-months, 15 permanent staff members and three First Nations staff (two of which were permanent) left the QFCC. Interdepartmental transfers accounted for 63 per cent of overall turnover. We had four staff members on parental leave, representing six per cent of the workforce, and illustrative of the large portion of staff members who are parents and carers.

In the 2023 Working for Queensland survey more than two-thirds of staff indicated their intention to stay for at least the next one to three years, with 33 per cent indicating their desire to leave within 12-months. Of these, 42 per cent cited a ‘lack of career opportunity’ as the reason.

Recruitment, student placements and partnerships

We have undertaken a review of our recruitment policies and practices, to ensure our compliance with the *Recruitment and Selection Directive 07/23*.⁶⁴ 32 staff completed a one-day Recruitment and Selection training course, delivered by the Australian Institute of Management, in partnership with the Public Sector Commission, to gain an understanding of the updated Directive and how it applies in practice.

During the year, we worked to attract, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the community we serve, by:

- designing and implementing a new role description template and guide for applicants to emphasise our value proposition
- promoting opportunities through First Nations organisations and partners
- partnering with the public sector’s Careers Pathways Service to improve career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, by providing culturally safe development opportunities, networking events, formal training and mentor support
- partnering with other agencies to facilitate the Leading Women Network to promote the representation of women in all levels, including through professional development opportunities and networking events
- amending our recruitment processes and implemented new directives brought about by the *Public Sector Act 2022*.

To increase consistency in management practices across the QFCC, a suite of resources, referred to as the Manager Toolkit, were developed to assist managers to better support their staff. The toolkit outlines the responsibilities and steps involved in managing key activities, such as recruitment and selection, onboarding, separations and the management of performance and development.

We were allocated one graduate during the year as part of the 2024–2026 Policy Futures Graduate Program. During the first six-month rotation, the graduate spent 12 weeks with the Systems Review team followed by 12 weeks with the Government Relations and Performance team engaging in a range of policy activities including interjurisdictional scans, policy submissions and preparing correspondence.

We also hosted a PhD candidate (University of Queensland) whose research focussed on the social-emotional wellbeing of children in OOHC. During their time at the QFCC, the researcher joined the Systems Review team, working on a kinship carer support project.

Five students undertook their School of Criminology and Criminal Justice Student professional practice placements with the QFCC from July to October 2023. These students were provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills and apply their theoretical knowledge to the issues being explored by the QFCC. An additional student undertook a six-month placement within the Systems Review team, supporting the Exiting Detention project.

Professional development and training

We invested over \$108,000 in the development and upskilling of staff, including the delivery of:

- **Vicarious Trauma Training** – Mandatory for all staff: As part of the Commission’s workplace review of psychosocial hazards and associated controls in accordance the *Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work code of practice*,⁶⁵ all staff participated in mandatory vicarious trauma workshops. This training was essential given the challenging content encountered by staff in their daily work. Strategies proposed by staff during the workshops were collated and combined with expert advice to inform our vicarious trauma management strategy. Additional training sessions are scheduled for 2024–2025.
- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** – As part of our ongoing commitment to fostering a safe and mentally well work environment, 12 QFCC staff members participated in MHFA training. Delivered by Mental Health First Aid Australia, the MHFA training provided valuable insights for responding to mental health challenges, empowering individuals to offer effective assistance. This training included dedicated components for supporting the LGBTIQ+ community and culturally safe approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **First Nations First Approach** – 18 QFCC staff members participated in the First Nations First Approach training, provided by Ngiyambalgarra Consultancy. The training took participants on a journey of cultural yarning and understanding through collaboration that is authentically and truly shared. Songwoman Maroochy opened the day with a moving Welcome to Country, which then led into a visual immersion journey through the ‘hidden

histories' timeline of First Nations people. Participants were introduced to the D.E.A.D.L.Y Lens and K.I.D.S Tool and taught how to embed both within the work of the Commission to ensure a First Nations First Approach across the work of the QFCC.

- **Common Approach** – The Common Approach is a prevention-focussed and flexible way of supporting quality conversations with young people and their families about all aspects of their wellbeing. 14 QFCC staff members completed a series of self-paced eLearning modules followed by an interactive workshop which provided an opportunity for staff to discuss learnings and practice the Common Approach with expert support and guidance. These practices inform the way we engage directly with children, young people and their families.
- **Recruitment and selection training** – Delivered by the Australian Institute of Management, in partnership with the Public Sector Commission, the one-day training provided 32 QFCC staff members the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in a recruitment and selection process by equipping them with an understanding of the legislation and Directive and how they are applied in practice.

This training was delivered in response to feedback from the 2023 Working for Queensland survey results and the recent all-staff workshop feedback which indicated staff wanted upskilling on recruitment and selection. Further, the training was delivered in response to recent changes to the *Public Sector Act 2022* and Recruitment and Selection Directive (07/23) led to a shift from merit-based recruiting to recruiting the eligible person best suited for the position.

- **Power BI Training** – We have committed to building our data storytelling capabilities to enhance our oversight and monitoring functions. To resource this commitment, seven operations staff participated in a three-day Power BI training course to enhance their foundational knowledge in using the platform to transform data and extract insights.
During the year, we delivered the Principle Focus dashboard and the Growing Up in Queensland Data Explorer, both using the Power BI platform. This training reduces risk in sustainability of products through multiple users having the ability to resolve issues and update data.
- **Adaptive Leadership Masterclass (Children, Youth and Families)** – The Adaptive Leadership Masterclass provides an immersive change laboratory where cross-sector leaders work together on an adaptive challenge that will improve outcomes for their organisations, clients and the community. Three QFCC leaders participated in workshops, webinars and online training designed to connect participants to their challenge statement.
- **Unconscious bias training** – A significant number of QFCC staff (44 staff members) participated in unconscious bias training delivered by the Queensland Human Rights Commission. The training focussed on recognising and managing unconscious biases to create fair, inclusive and discrimination-free workplaces and communities. The training raised awareness of bias from the unconscious to the conscious level and provided methods for positively managing prejudices for improved decision making.

- **Youth Advocate Advocacy Development Days** – In March 2024, Youth Advocates were invited to attend a two-day skill-building weekend in Brisbane. The development days provided several networking opportunities and formal training in the areas of advocacy, framing, powerful communication and presenting. Feedback from the attending Youth Advocates was overwhelmingly positive. They also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to build skills they could immediately apply and take back to their communities. With over 25 Youth Advocate attendees, this opportunity also enabled great attendance at the first Youth Advisory Council meeting for 2024.

Increasing staff wellbeing

Throughout 2023–2024 we invested in several initiatives that encouraged physical, mental and financial wellbeing.

Converge International was appointed as the QFCC’s new Employee Assistance Program provider following a successful procurement process. They provide a confidential, short-term counselling service designed to help support staff and their immediate family members with a range of concerns, both personal and professional. Converge also provides staff the opportunity to develop strategies to drive positive changes in behaviour and lifestyle.

48 staff completed the Working for Queensland 2023 survey, resulting in a 72 per cent participation rate. A range of positive results were noted, including effective communication between staff and line managers leading to respectful and engaging teamwork environments where staff felt comfortable raising matters with their line managers and that work expectations were made clear. Staff also shared that they felt clear about the future direction of the QFCC.

Staff have access to a variety of flexible working options to support ongoing work/life needs. These include, but are not limited to, hybrid working arrangements, compressed hours, part-time hours, and remote work locations, including utilising distributed work centres.

A portion of staff indicated that they felt their work was emotionally demanding and that their work left them feeling emotionally exhausted. In response to this, and to ensure that the QFCC is acting in accordance with Workplace Health and Safety Queensland’s *Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work code of practice*,⁶⁶ a review was undertaken to assess how controls were appropriate and effective. Given the breadth of work undertaken across the QFCC, each team was asked to undertake a self-assessment of the types of psychosocial hazards they encountered, as well as current controls in place. Staff were also asked to contribute their ideas for additional controls that could act as protective factors against these hazards, including against vicarious trauma. The Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services, led several weekly wellness sessions for staff. The optional sessions included meditation, staff morning teas and sharing online resources.

All-staff workshops

Two all-staff workshops were held during the year. On 10 November, QFCC staff came together to workshop a range of topics including Working for Queensland results, team purpose statements and reflections on 2023. The workshop also provided an opportunity for the executive leadership team members to discuss leadership and how staff can lead at all levels. On 6 March, QFCC staff came together to reflect on recent successes, engage in forward-planning activities and partake in conversations around contemporising our approaches and leveraging the power of our partnerships to deliver on our strategic objectives.

QFCC Social club

The QFCC Social Club is a committee of QFCC staff members who arrange opportunities for staff to engage with each other in a fun and social manner. During the year, the Social Club maintained the staff tuckshop, the Containers for Change donation bin and arranged social events including karaoke, a picnic, R U OK Day cookie decorating, fundraising morning teas, and the staff Christmas party.

Union meetings

QFCC Together Union members met with the executive team on three occasions to ask questions and discuss concerns. Both the Union and executive place value on advancing staff wellbeing and are committed to working together towards this mutual goal. The Union remains an active participant at the Agency Consultative Committee, which supports all staff.

A significant achievement for the Union this year was obtaining approval for staff to elect to observe the gazetted public holiday scheduled for 26 January 2024 on an alternative date. We recognise the historical significance of 26 January, and upon receiving a request from the Union, sought advice from the Public Sector Commission and Office of Industrial Relations to enable us to offer staff the option of taking a day off in lieu on 29 January 2024. Twelve impacted staff, whose ordinary workday fell on 26 January 2024, opted to work. The Union plans to work with the QFCC, Public Sector Commission and Office of Industrial Relations to consider implementing this as a permanent arrangement.

Leading Women Network

We continue to be a partner agency in the Leading Women Network which promotes a diverse and inclusive work environment through the representation of women at all working levels. In May 2024, we joined smaller agencies within the network to co-host a professional development and networking event 'Tackling Domestic and Family Violence by raising awareness and building resilience' aligning with DFV Prevention month. The event included a keynote presentation by Vanessa Fowler OAM, Co-chair, Queensland DFV Prevention Council, and Chair of the Allison Baden-Clay Foundation.

Organisational change

One structure change occurred in 2023–2024. The decision was made to decentralise youth participation functions across the QFCC with the view of improving the capability and capacity of key teams in alignment with our expectations that child and youth participation and engagement is everyone’s responsibility.

Early retirement, redundancy and retrenchment

No redundancy, early retirement or retrenchment packages were paid in 2023–2024.

Public Sector Ethics and Public Sector Values

Our staff are covered by the *Code of Conduct* established for the Queensland Public Service. Code of Conduct principles and their associated set of values form part of induction training for new staff, and staff are required to complete mandatory online Code of Conduct training annually. Our performance and development framework and processes also address Code of Conduct expectations. No code of conduct investigations or complaints were initiated or finalised in 2023–2024.

In 2023–2024, we continued to embrace the Queensland public service values of Customers first, Ideas into action, Unleash potential, Be courageous and Empower people. These values help guide our staff’s behaviour and the way we conduct business.

Human Rights Act 2019

QFCC staff undertake annual mandatory online training on human rights for public sector employees and our project and governance processes embed human rights impact assessments.

Complaints

The QFCC received no formal complaints in 2023–2024.

Work health and safety incidents and claims

There were three notified incidents in 2023–2024, down from five in the previous financial year. There are no active Workcover claims.

Our organisational governance

We are committed to continuously improving our organisational governance, systems, structures and processes. We operate a number of external and internal governance bodies to provide direction and structured decision-making channels for our performance.

QFCC Advisory Council

Under Part 4 of the Act, the Principal Commissioner convenes an Advisory Council to:

- help promote the shared responsibility all Queenslanders have for keeping children safe
- provide insight into the issues affecting children, families and the child and family support sector
- provide guidance on the work of the Commission.

In early 2024, we amended the membership and meeting format of the Advisory Council to bring together more than 30 leaders in child and family policy and practice. Members meet quarterly to connect and collaborate on opportunities to advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and families. Since this change, the group has met twice and is scheduled to meet twice in the second half of 2024. The Advisory Council’s current membership includes individual members and representatives from the agencies outlined in Table 9.

Table 9: Advisory Council Membership

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service	Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation
Australian Catholic University	CHQ Hospital and Health Service
Bravehearts	Health and Wellbeing Queensland
Brisbane Youth Service	OPG
CRQ	Queensland Human Rights Commission
Daniel Morcombe Foundation	QMHC
Kummara	QPS
Micah Projects	Queensland Council of Social Service
Michael Hogan Consulting	Queensland Foster and Kinship Care
National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect	Queensland University of Technology
PeakCare Queensland Inc.	yourtown
Q Shelter	
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak	

QFCC Youth Advisory Council

The QFCC Youth Advisory Council amplifies the voices of children and young people in Queensland and provides advice and recommendations to the Commissioners. It is a collective of young people, supported by the QFCC, brought together to:

- provide advice to the Commissioners on important issues impacting young people in Queensland

- provide ideas and strategies to support youth participation in decisions that impact young people
- provide advice to the broader QFCC and external stakeholders to elevate and amplify the voices of children and young people.

All Youth Advocates are invited to participate in these meetings. The meetings are held quarterly, providing advice to QFCC staff and Commissioners on the significant topics for children and young people in Queensland. The Council's terms of reference and discussion items were co-designed with the Council members.

In 2023–2024, Youth Advocates attended, contributed to, and chaired four hybrid Youth Advisory Council meetings, including a regional meeting in Rockhampton where Commissioner Twyford and members of the QFCC Youth Participation team were joined by more than 20 young people. They discussed the lack of safe spaces, lack of reliable public transport, lack of employment pathways and job opportunities and insufficient activities for young people to participate in. Topics discussed at other meetings included racism including the sharing of harms and scope that racism has in Queensland, such as within society, in the media, and in schooling.

Lived experience expert panel

In 2023–2024 Commissioner Twyford established a lived experience expert panel to assist with the residential care review. This panel included 12 young Queenslanders from across the state who had spent time in Queensland residential care homes. This group met five times, including an all-day workshop in Brisbane, and four online meetings to review the government's *Residential Care Roadmap*. Life Without Barriers and the CREATE Foundation supported this group's membership.

Internal Management Committees

Executive Leadership Board: Our primary decision-making body comprised of Senior Executives, Senior Officers and two staff representatives as advisors (appointed for four-month terms following an open invitation process). It oversees our performance against strategic objectives, financial performance, performance management, collaboration, risk management, innovation fostering, governance administration and organisational compliance.

Senior Executive Meeting: The Senior Executives work together to identify and respond to emergent issues as well as exchange knowledge and information about our operations.

Agency Consultative Committee: Chaired by the Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services, this Committee provided a formal mechanism for staff to share their views on workplace matters and organisational performance, raise concerns and share information with leadership. It also provided formal input into our policies, procedures and templates.

People and Finance Committee: Oversaw the effectiveness of our workforce, culture, governance and financial management. It briefed the Commissioners on changes to government policies and governance requirements.

Audit and Risk Management Committee

The Audit and Risk Management Committee meets quarterly, with the Chair and Deputy Chair positions held by members external to government. The Committee oversees risk management, financial management, compliance and internal controls, and internal and external audit. Its purpose is to provide independent assurance and advice to the Principal Commissioner on the Commission’s risk and compliance management frameworks. The Committee’s responsibilities and achievements in 2023–2024 included:

- reviewing and monitoring the strategic and operational risk registers
- monitoring risk mitigation controls of QFCC major projects
- monitoring the implementation of previous (internal and external) audit recommendations
- reviewing and endorsing the annual audit plan for the upcoming financial year.

Remuneration for external members is \$500 (Chair) and \$300 (Deputy Chair) per meeting.

The Committee met four times in 2023–2024.

Standing members

Heather Watson	Watson Advisory and Consulting Pty Ltd (External ARMC member) (Chair)
Laura Gilchrist	Independent member
Anne Edwards	Executive Director, Operations, QFCC
Christopher Smith	a/Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services, QFCC

Regular observers

Jacqueline Thornley	Director, Queensland Audit Office (QAO)
Sabrina Frank	Senior Manager, QAO
Linda Holm	Manager, Audit Services, CAA
Lyle Gerbich	Director, Corporate Services, QFCC
Luke Twyford	Principal Commissioner, QFCC

Updated policies and procedures

Several corporate policies were updated to ensure effective and efficient use of financial resources, streamline delegations, manage risks and ensure appropriate support for staff. These included:

- Child and Youth Risk Management Policy
- Financial Management Practice Manual
- Gift Card Procedure
- Sponsorship Policy
- Responding to Customer Complaints
- Procurement Policy
- Cabcharge Policy
- Hours of Work Policy
- Risk Management Framework and Guidelines
- Corporate Card Policy
- Travel Policy
- Secondment Guidelines
- Communication Framework
- Financial and Procurement Delegations Policy
- Human Resource Delegations
- Preventing and Responding to Workplace Sexual Harassment Policy

ICT infrastructure and recordkeeping

The QFCC operates under the requirements of the *Public Records Act 2002* and the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*. It maintains full and accurate records of its activities in accordance with the Queensland Government Records Governance Policy. We use the OpenText Content Management application to meet our record-keeping governance obligations.

During the past year, we managed our information and communication technologies on a predominantly outsourced model, with most operating systems, computing support and application support provided by third party vendors. Our information technology systems infrastructure was primarily managed by Citec, with service management contracted to the CAA.

Our Queensland Child Death Register System, Coda, underwent a package of enhancements to support child death prevention approaches. These enhancements included:

- improved flexibility in task flow and settings to reduce unnecessary task allocation
- improved display of data for International Classification of Diseases 10 coding by the Australian Bureau of Statistics mortality coders, who undertake coding of causes of death
- a new field for SUDI deaths to trial use of decision framework and categories from the Sudden Unexpected Infant Death case registry (from the USA)
- a new field under autopsy findings to capture pathologist's comments on unexplained injuries and/or historical abuse.

Additional changes have been prompted from the *Paediatric Sepsis Mortality Study* report, including:

- a new section to collect information on infection-related deaths
- modified fields and options to improve data quality on contact with health services medical history contact.

Risk management

We maintain risk management systems and processes as a key component of our governance framework. Our *Risk Management Framework* outlines the approach taken to risk management. Risk management is reflected in all business activities, enabling risk identification and management at the appropriate management level. Both the QFCC Executive Leadership Board and Audit and Risk Management Committee oversight the QFCC's risk management framework, registers and processes.

Strategic risks

- An inability to source high-quality data outcomes—reduces our capacity to effectively monitor the impact of the child and family support system, restricting our ability to drive improvements and build a culture of accountability.
- Failure to include the voices of young Queenslanders in our decisions—diminishes our ability to influence change.
- Ineffective partnering with stakeholders—limits opportunities to facilitate sustainable system change.

Strategic opportunities

- Extend our capability and influence to provide stronger oversight of the systems responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children and young people.
- Expand engagement with young Queenslanders from all backgrounds and geographical locations to further inform decisions impacting their lives.
- Reaffirm the role and responsibilities of family, community, government and service providers in protecting children's rights.
- Position the Commission as an authoritative source of advice and expertise on issues impacting the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Engage with non-government service providers to enhance our oversight of the child and family support system.

Audits

Internal audit

In 2023–2024, CAA undertook one internal audit on recruitment practices and finalised a report on an audit on leave and timesheet functions and processes, undertaken in June 2023. Both audit reports were presented to Senior Management and the Audit and Risk Management Committee during the year.

The leave and timesheet functions and processes audit assessed whether we had appropriate systems in place to accurately record employee's hours of work and leave taken. The audit highlighted several instances (mostly one-off occurrences) of non-compliance with the *General Employees (Queensland Government Departments) and Other Employees Award – State 2015 (Award)* and QFCC policy. Specifically, employees not taking an adequate meal break between the third and sixth hours of duty, leave applications that were not pre-approved and/or approved by an appropriate delegate, and TOIL that was not pre-approved by an appropriate delegate. Four recommendations deemed low in nature by CAA were subsequently accepted and implemented.

The recruitment practices assessed whether we had appropriate policies, procedures, and practices in place for the effective management of its recruitment practices. The CAA auditor determined that our policies and procedures were satisfactory with the recruitment practices at the time of the audit and were well supported by appropriate policies, guidelines, forms, templates, toolkits, and retention of relevant documents. One recommendation deemed low priority by CAA and one business process improvement was subsequently accepted and implemented.

External audit

Each year the QAO performs an audit assessment of the design and implementation of our internal controls, which includes an interim and final audit. The QAO's final 2024 audit focussed on financial statements and transaction testing. No control deficiencies or other financial reporting issues were identified in the audit. The final 2024 audit closing report was presented to the Audit and Risk Management Committee at their August 2024 meeting. At the exit meeting, the QAO provided positive comments on our working papers and reconciliations.

In August 2024, the QAO provided their 2024 audit report. The audit undertook substantive testing of expenditure, payroll and journals. The QAO determined our internal control environment supports an audit strategy where our controls are sound. No unresolved internal control deficiencies or financial reporting issues were identified.



The performance of the Queensland child protection system

Our legislation requires us to report annually on Queensland's performance in relation to achieving state and national goals relating to the child protection system. This includes Queensland's performance over time in comparison to other jurisdictions, and Queensland's progress in reducing the number of, and improving the outcomes for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

We assessed Queensland's performance across 2023–2024 against state goals in the *Supporting Families Changing Futures 2019–2023* whole-of-government strategy;⁶⁷ national goals (focus areas) in *Safe and Supported: The national framework for protecting Australia's children 2021–2031*,⁶⁸ including focus areas within the *Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026*⁶⁹ and key indicators from the Family Matters⁷⁰ and Closing the Gap⁷¹ reports. As there are clear overlaps between the goals in these strategies, we have aligned them against five common goals (see Table 10):

Table 10: Alignment of state and national goals – The performance of the Queensland child protection system 2023–2024 report

Goals used in this report:	State goals	National goals
1. The Queensland child protection and family support system is supporting families earlier	2. Supporting Queensland families earlier	1. A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage
2. There are sufficient resources to provide quality support services to Queensland children and families when needed	3. Working better with Queensland families who are in contact with the child protection system 6. Delivering quality services to Queensland children and families through a capable, motivated, and client-focussed workforce	4. Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability
3. Queensland’s OOHC and youth justice systems are upholding the rights of the children and young people they serve	4. Improving care and post-care for Queensland children and young people	4. Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability
4. Queensland’s OOHC and youth justice systems are meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities	5. Meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities	2. Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems
5. The Queensland child protection and family support system is a collaborative and accountable system	1. Sharing responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children 7. Building and maintaining an accountable, transparent, and cost-effective system	3. Improved information sharing, data development and analysis

Goal 1: The Queensland child protection and family support system supports families earlier

National and international research provides strong evidence that an increased investment in prevention and early intervention programs is the best way to bolster community wellbeing and to prevent child abuse and neglect. Early support for families can deliver both immediate benefits to children and young people and enhance the long-term wellbeing of families, communities and society. Universal services including parenting programs, playgroups, neighbourhood centres, health, early childhood, education, housing, drug and alcohol services, mental health and domestic and family violence (DFV) services all play a critical role in addressing concerns in a family before matters reach a safety crisis.

Providing early support to children, young people and families experiencing vulnerability can safeguard their wellbeing and development and prevent their entry into the statutory system. Early intervention includes intervening early in life, early in the developmental pathway, or early in the life of the problem.

How does Queensland compare?

Investment in early supports is increasing but is still low. Queensland has made notable strides in providing early support through various funded services. Family and Child Connect offers community-based referral services, while secondary family support services and universal healthcare, early childhood, education, and school initiatives also play vital roles. Despite increased investment in these areas, Queensland faces challenges in preventing families from entering the child protection system.

Across the last three years, expenditure on family services has increased, with Queensland's expenditure on IFS services rising significantly, from \$127.16 million in 2019–2020 to \$141.37 million in 2022–2023, marking an 11.2 per cent increase compared to a 0.2 per cent increase nationwide. Despite this increase, the per-child spend in Queensland (\$8333) still lags behind Victoria (\$15,440) and New South Wales (\$13,610) and the rate of children entering child protection remains unchanged, indicating this early support isn't fully effective in reaching those that require it.

Nationally in 2022–2023, Queensland had the third-highest rate of children in child protection services (34.4 per 1000), behind the Northern Territory (92.7 per 1000) and Victoria (34.7 per 1000).⁷² This increase underscores the need for more effective early intervention strategies.

In June 2024, the Queensland Government released its *Putting Queensland Kids First* plan⁷³ and announced a funding commitment of more than \$501 million for its implementation. The plan seeks to improve the wellbeing of Queensland's children and families by strengthening supports during the early years and increasing preventative and early supports during critical milestones and periods of development. Relevant wellbeing investments include funding to support partnerships between non-government organisations, ATSIACCs, housing and support services for young mothers, babies and families, and the provision of more sustained health home visiting and antenatal supports.

What is working well?

The use and effectiveness of Queensland’s family support services. Over the past four years, Queensland consistently had the second highest rate of children receiving Intensive Family Support (IFS) services, trailing only Tasmania. In 2022–2023, this rate was 14.0 per 1000 Queensland children. Most Queensland families who attended either an IFS service or FWS whose cases were closed with ‘all or the majority of their needs met’ did not have a subsequent notification, although there has been a slight drop in the proportion over time (see Table 11).⁷⁴ Many families are proactively seeking help, with nearly one in six referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FWS initiated by families themselves.

Table 11: Number (percentage) of children whose case was closed with ‘all or the majority of their needs met’ with no subsequent DCSSDS notification within six months

	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023
IFS	3171 (90.8%)	3001 (90.1%)	3444 (88.1%)	3670 (87.9%)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FWS	1377 (91.7%)	1869 (93.0%)	1870 (87.3%)	1878 (89.4%)

Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

Increased investment in homelessness prevention. Recent years have seen substantial commitments from both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to enhance social and affordable housing.⁷⁵ The Queensland Government's 2024 *Homes for Queenslanders* initiative⁷⁶ has been pivotal, featuring significant investments aimed at preventing homelessness among children, young people and vulnerable families. Key investments include eight new youth foyers,⁷⁷ a new support centre for youth at risk of homelessness,⁷⁸ and placement of a youth justice team within the Department of Housing to support young people as they exit detention. Additionally, the Immediate Housing Response for Families fund has provided 160,000 nights of accommodation and supported 7680 households.⁷⁹ Under the *Homes for Queenslanders* plan, an independent review set to be released in late 2024 will evaluate the effectiveness of Queensland’s homelessness response.

Increased investment and collaborative efforts in early childhood. Early Years Services improve early childhood developmental outcomes with activities that respond to the needs and families. In 2023–2024 the Government invested in two purpose-built facilities to bring together school communities, their families and local services and supports in the South East region. Key EYS programs include but are not limited to Early Years Places which are provided in more than 50 communities across Queensland and Pathways for Early Learning and Development. The total number of children participating at an Early Years Service for the July – December 2023 period, as reported by the services, was 10,849.

Place-based approaches recognise the multi-dimensional nature of communities and that joined-up, collaborative efforts by the community, government and non-government partners, will improve wellbeing. Grants to small local services and statewide organisations support the

delivery of a range of Early Years Services across Queensland to give children a strong start. Cross-agency consultation is occurring to ensure proposed additional integrated response locations and services are responding holistically to community contexts and needs. This consultation is aiming to understand and improve access for young children and their families to early childhood services and programs, as protective factors required to support child development and family wellbeing.

Increased funding for mental health and alcohol and drug use initiatives. The Queensland Government has increased funding for mental health and substance use initiatives, launching a 5-year plan to improve the wellbeing of all Queenslanders. *Shifting minds: The Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs, and Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan 2023–2028*, introduced in August 2023, aims to prevent and reduce the impact of mental ill-health, substance use and suicide. Key investments include:

- \$1.65 billion allocated to *Better Care Together: A plan for Queensland's state-funded mental health, alcohol and other drug services to 2027*⁸⁰
- new frontline mental health services for children and young people, including acute response teams at 12 Hospital and Health Services across the state⁸¹
- dedicated adolescent mental health unit⁸²
- funding to support new parents and infants through investments in perinatal healthcare.⁸³

Additionally, existing services such as Kids Helpline and Lifeline have also received additional funding.^{84,85} *Shifting minds* will be supported by a monitoring and evaluation framework led by the QMHC.⁸⁶ Further health initiatives include vaping prevention and providing education on drugs, alcohol, mental health and sexual consent for year 12 students.⁸⁷

Targeted investment by DoE to improve school engagement and fund support initiatives to improve school completion rates. After a low of 48.7 per cent in 2022, school attendance rates (attending school 90% of the time) increased in 2023 to 54.9 per cent. While this was an improvement, rates are far below pre-COVID levels (68.3% in 2019).⁸⁸ Similar trends have occurred in other states and territories and, in response, a 2022–2023 national inquiry recommended better access to mental health care for students.^{89,90} Since 2023, the Queensland Government has funded various initiatives to enhance school engagement and completion, including programs for First Nations students, expanding Pathways State Colleges for vulnerable students, intensive case management for justice-involved students,⁹¹ and the Regional Youth Engagement Service. These initiatives are timely as the apparent year 10 to year 12 retention rate has steadily dropped from 88.1 per cent in 2019 to 80.7 per cent in 2023.⁹² In 2022, the Regional Youth Engagement Service helped 5870 at-risk and disengaged young people, with 2584 re-engaging in education, training or employment.⁹³ Between 2019 and 2023, the proportion of young people who had completed year 12 or equivalent rose from 89.6 per cent to 92.2 per cent, suggesting the positive impact of these investments.⁹⁴

Closing the Gap outcome 5 is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential. In 2021, 75.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

aged 20–24 years had attained a year 12 or equivalent qualification. This outcome has been improving but the target is not yet on track.⁹⁵

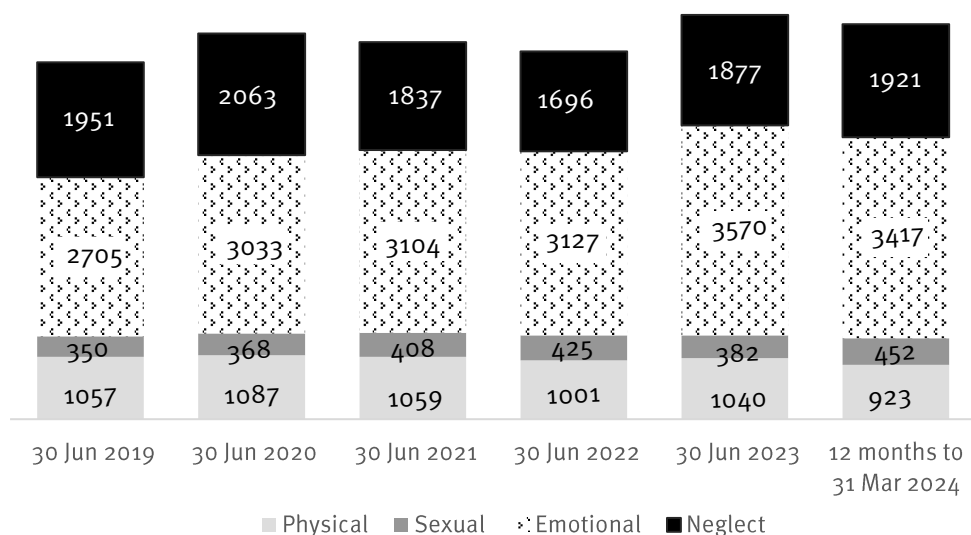
Higher kindergarten enrolment rates driven by funded subsidies. In 2023 the QFCC published a report analysing the life trajectories of 30 children that had died. The analysis emphasised the protective factors that engagement in early childhood education provide for infants. The Queensland Government will invest \$2 billion over four years to ensure all children can access free kindergarten, with a focus on children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. Kindergarten funding is also provided to address educational disadvantage (kindy uplift program), inclusion and attraction and retention of early childhood teachers (scholarship scheme, paid practicum and planning days). Rates of kindergarten enrolment for children experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, have increased between 2020 and 2023 from 80.2 per cent to 92.6 per cent. However, enrolment rates vary by region, from 100 per cent enrolment in the North Coast and Metropolitan North regions to 87 per cent in the both the Darling Downs and North Queensland regions.⁹⁶

Closing the Gap outcome 3 is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years. In 2022, 95.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in ‘year before full-time schooling’ early childhood education, meaning this target has been met.

What needs further improvement?

The increase in substantiated harm against Queensland children. More Queensland children have been found to have been harmed or at risk of harm with a 12.1 per cent increase in substantiated child protection investigations from 6063 in 2018–2019 to 6713 in the 12 months to 31 March 2024.⁹⁷ To 31 March 2024, the growth in the number of children substantiated was driven by a 26.3 per cent increase in substantiated cases of emotional abuse (Figure 1). In 2018–2019, emotional abuse comprised 44.6 per cent of all substantiations, and this rose to 52.0 per cent in 2022–2023.

Figure 1: Number of children subject to a notification, where an investigation and assessment has been finalised and the outcome was recorded as substantiated by abuse type



Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

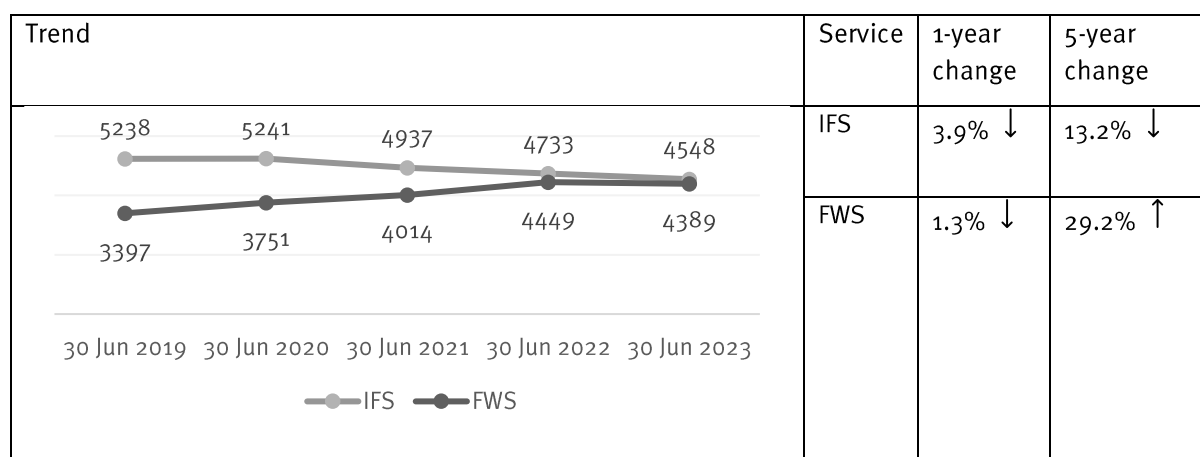
Unaddressed adversity continues to be a precursor to youth justice exposure. Almost two in five young people (38%) under supervision on an average day in 2022–2023 were from the lowest socioeconomic areas, compared with about one in 20 young people (4.9%) from the highest socioeconomic areas. Among offenders who were surveyed in Queensland’s 2023 Youth Justice Census:

- 48 per cent had disengaged from education, training or employment
- 53 per cent had experienced or been impacted by DFV
- 30 per cent had been living in unstable and/or unsuitable accommodation
- 25 per cent had at least one parent who spent time in adult custody
- 44 per cent had a disability (diagnosed or suspected)
- 44 per cent had at least one mental health and/or behavioural disorder (diagnosed or suspected).

Increased investment in Family Support services is not reaching the families that require support. In 2023, only seven per cent of respondents to our frontline workforce survey agreed there was sufficient capacity within the secondary support service system to meet demand, up from five per cent in 2021, while 83 per cent disagreed. Only 20 per cent believed that IFS and FWS have reduced demand on the child protection system, with sentiment showing a consistent downward trend since 2020 (27 per cent).⁹⁸ In the QFCC survey of 319 parents and carers who had been in contact with the child protection system, 45 per cent felt they received helpful family support services, while 36 per cent disagreed. The remaining parents neither

agreed nor disagreed.⁹⁹ Concerns have been raised by our stakeholders about families not attending secondary support services following a referral. In 2022–2023, only 40 per cent of the 6203 families referred to IFS and 47.3 per cent of the 5259 families referred to FWS consented to commence services.¹⁰⁰ The number of families receiving IFS services continues to drop while the number accessing FWS is increasing (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of families attending IFS services and FWS



Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

The increased prevalence of DFV despite significant investment in prevention and a service system that is struggling to meet demand. DFV-related offences increased notably from 423.7 per 100,000 persons in 2021–2022 to 518.9 per 100,000 in 2022–2023.¹⁰¹ The reasons for this increase are complex, driven by factors such as heightened public awareness and improved reporting mechanisms.¹⁰² Between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2023, 123 DFV-related deaths occurred in the context of an intimate partner or family relationship in Queensland. Of these 123 deaths, the alleged homicide offender was male in 68 per cent of cases.¹⁰³ Sixteen deaths occurred in 2022–2023. Additionally, in 2022–2023, 37 (62%) of children whose deaths were reviewed by the Board had experienced DFV in their life.

Across 2023–2024, addressing DFV was a top priority for both state and Commonwealth governments, prompting significant strategies and funding.^{104, 105} Queensland's approach is informed by the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce's *Hear Her Voice* reports, which provide an extensive analysis of legal and social responses to DFV in Queensland.¹⁰⁶ A major reform agenda is currently underway to combat DFV and sexual violence¹⁰⁷ which includes substantial funding for DFV prevention initiatives and improved support for survivors. Key measures include updated legislation on coercive control and affirmative consent,¹⁰⁸ along with significant investments in DFV services¹⁰⁹ and accommodation for women escaping DFV.^{110, 111} In December 2023 the Queensland Government published a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the outcomes and impacts of system level domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) reforms. Anticipated short-term outcomes include increasing awareness about DFSV, increased willingness to report DFSV and increased accountability for people using DFSV.¹¹² A recent progress report by the Office of the Independent Implementation Supervisor highlighted concerns about the readiness of the DFV service system for the new offence of coercive control. Stakeholders reported that services remain

primarily crisis-driven and are unable to meet current demand. Issues with recruiting and retaining skilled staff were also noted¹¹³ and for the third year running, the QFCC's annual survey of frontline workers identified specialist DFV, alcohol and drug use, and mental health training as the highest priority for learning and development.¹¹⁴

The rising cost of living continuing to drive housing stress and homelessness for children and families, despite significant government investment. Over the past three years, there has been a sharp increase in the cost of living, including housing costs. In our 2024 Community perceptions survey, 91.0 per cent of respondents agreed the cost of living is having a negative impact on families. This was slightly higher for respondents responsible for a child aged 0–17 years (93%) than others (90% of those not responsible for a child).¹¹⁵ As of 30 June 2022, there were 19,741 children and young people on the Queensland public housing register awaiting housing offers.¹¹⁶ The number of Queensland families and children accessing specialist homelessness services has been rising year on year with a particularly sharp increase between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 from 1112 to 1629 families, despite a national decrease.¹¹⁷ Between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, Queensland saw a 41.3 per cent increase in families accessing these services, while Australia as a whole experienced a 7.5 per cent decrease. Queensland also saw a 7.3 per cent increase in young people accessing homelessness services, compared to a 10.8 per cent decrease nationally.¹¹⁸ There was also a 6.2 per cent increase in children under a child protection order seeking support (from 1200 to 1274). From 2018 to 2023, median rents in Queensland increased by 42.9 per cent (based on a three bedroom house).¹¹⁹ Private rent in Queensland has risen faster than in any other Australian jurisdiction, particularly in regional markets.¹²⁰ Rent increases have far outpaced wage growth and family support payments.¹²¹ In 2023, 13.1 per cent of Queensland young people were very or extremely concerned about financial security.¹²²

Closing the Gap outcome 9 is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and needs. In 2021, 81.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were living in appropriately sized (not over-crowded) housing. This target, which is 88 per cent by 2031, is not on track.^{123,124}

The prevalence of health issues, including mental health, and drug and alcohol misuse, especially among children and families in contact with statutory systems, despite new funding. In 2021, only 50.0 per cent of Queensland children were developmentally on track for physical health and wellbeing in their first year of schooling.¹²⁵ This highlights the importance of accessible health assessments for vulnerable Queensland families to ensure children can receive developmental assessments and appropriate supports during their early years.¹²⁶ Among children in contact with the child protection system, 65.0 per cent of households with a child in need of protection had a parent with a mental health issue, and 67.0 per cent had a parent with a current or past drug or alcohol problem. Nearly one quarter of children in OHC rate their mental health as poor or very poor.

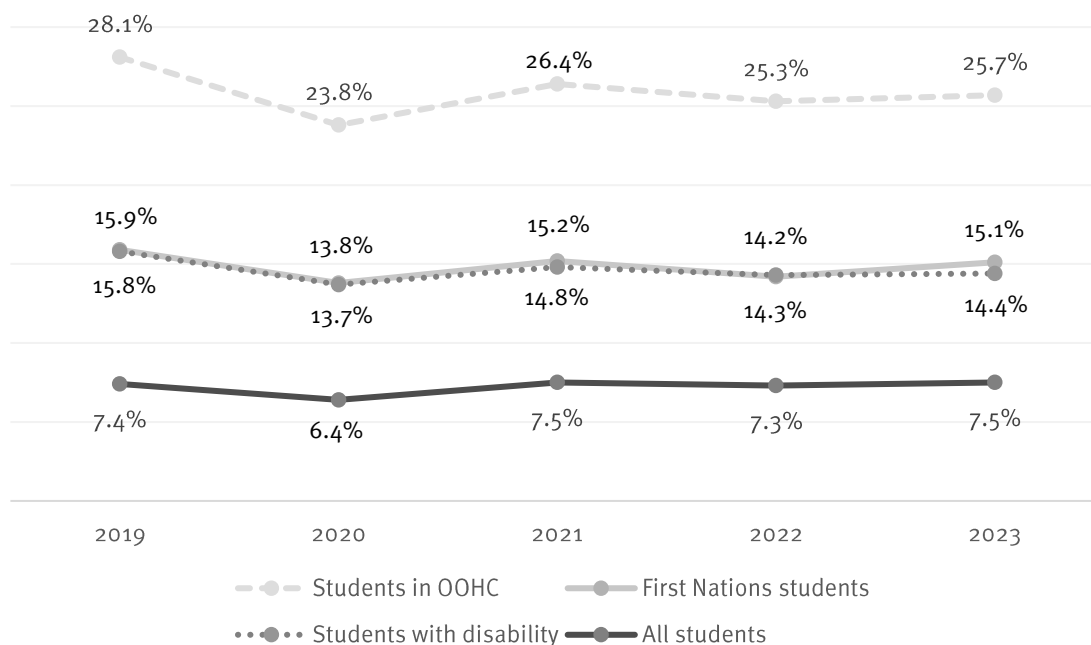
Suicide has become the leading cause of death among children aged 10 to 14 years, as shown in our *Child Death Annual Report 2022–2023*.¹²⁷ In our *Growing Up in Queensland* report, 34.8 per cent of young Queenslanders were very concerned about mental health, and 40.7 per cent were very concerned about coping with stress.¹²⁸ Despite increased funding, findings from our

2024 Community perceptions survey indicate that 68.0 per cent of respondents who tried to access youth mental health services in the last three years experienced barriers. These barriers included long waitlists (72%), unaffordable services (58%), uncertainty about how to get a referral (23%) and lack of services in their area (20%).¹²⁹ Only 43.0 per cent of respondents to our 2024 workforce survey agreed that children and young people attending their organisation could access mental health services when needed. Another identified barrier was young pregnant women unable to access perinatal mental health services due to restrictions limiting services to pregnant women over the age of 18 years.¹³⁰

Among young offenders, 81.0 per cent have used at least one substance, 38.0 per cent have used ice or other methamphetamines, and 44.0 per cent have a mental health and/or behavioural disorder.¹³¹

Student Disciplinary Absences for First Nations children and the likelihood of students with a disability and those in OOHC to perform less well academically. In 2022, the QFCC submitted concerns to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the National School Reform Agreement, and in 2023, our *Child Rights Report* repeated concerns about the overuse of SDAs and their impact on children and young people.¹³² Both reports stressed the need for alternative pathways to ensure children can continue their education and stay connected to school staff who can refer them to broader support services. Overall, rates of SDAs have been stable since 2019. In 2023, compared to all students, rates of SDAs were approximately double among students with a disability and First Nations students while rates of SDAs among students living in OOHC were 3.4 times higher. Furthermore, in 2023, in every year level, students in OOHC were less likely to have a 'proficiency level of developing, strong, or exceeding result' compared with non-OOHC students. For example, 62.4 per cent of year 3 OOHC students versus 86.0 per cent of non-OOHC students met this proficiency level for writing, while 56.9 per cent of year 3 OOHC students versus 83.5 per cent of non-OOHC students met this proficiency level for numeracy.¹³³

Figure 3: SDAs for four groups of Queensland children



Source: DoE, unpublished data request, 2024.

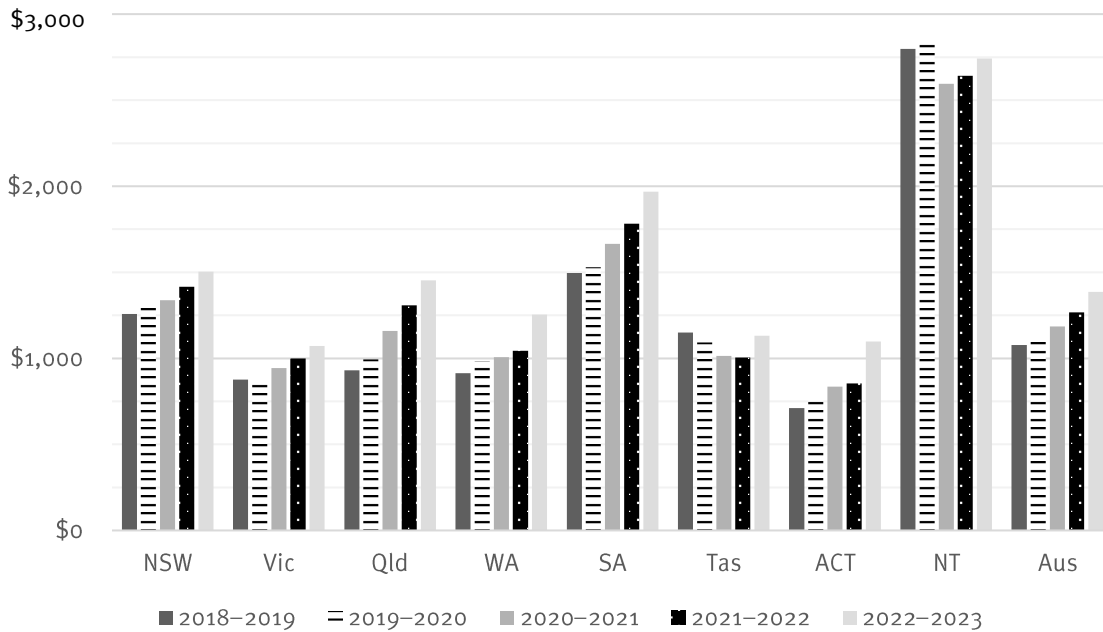
Goal 2: There are sufficient resources to provide quality support services to Queensland children and families when needed

In Queensland, the child protection and family support systems respond to concerns about the care and protection of children who have been, or who are at risk of being abused, neglected or exploited by their family. The child protection and family support systems consist of both secondary and statutory approaches, which are provided based on the level of need, risk and harm. Children and their families may receive a secondary service to support families to keep their children safe or a statutory response, which may include being subject to an investigation.

How does Queensland compare?

Figure 4 presents a comparison of the dollar amount spent per child aged 0–17 years on protective intervention services and care services across Australian jurisdictions over the past five years. It shows that overall expenditure is increasing and that Queensland’s spend per child (\$1454) in 2022–2023 was the fourth highest behind the Northern Territory (\$2741), South Australia (\$1968) and New South Wales (\$1503).¹³⁴

Figure 4: Comparison of the dollar amount spent per child aged 0–17 years over the past five years

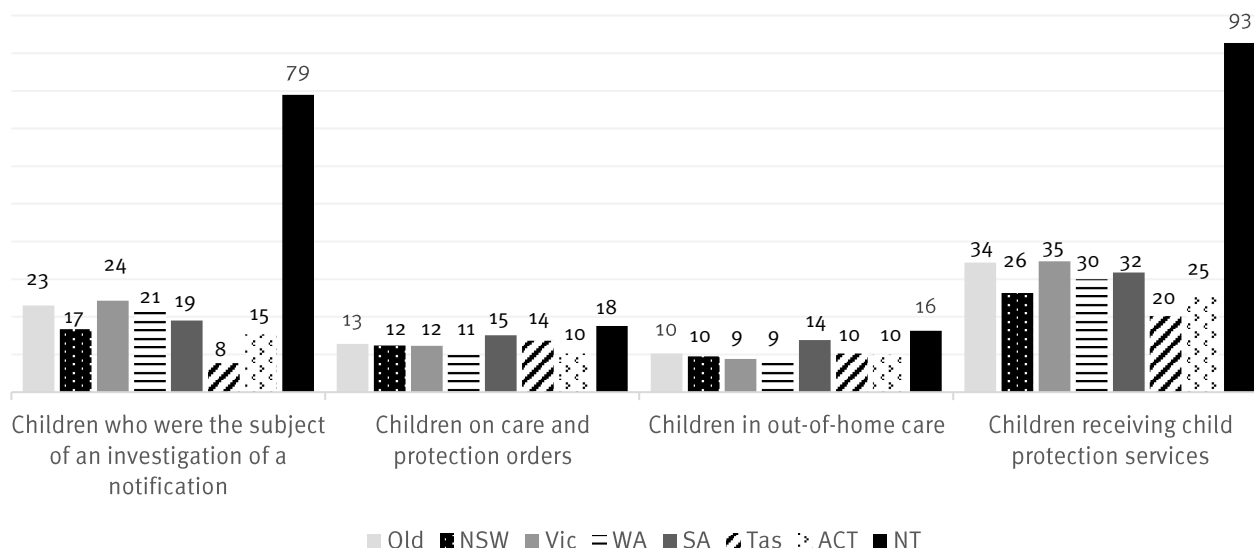


Source: Productivity Commission (2024) *Report on government services – Table 16A.8*

In the 2024–2025 budget, \$2.30 billion was allocated to child and family services within the DCSSDS, down from \$2.36 billion in 2023–2024. It should be noted that machinery of government changes which occurred in May and December 2023 led to the transfer of some department functions.¹³⁵ Capital works funding of \$9.25 million has been allocated to the development of Unify and other information system enhancements as well as \$5.51 million to update child and family services facilities.¹³⁶

During 2022–2023, 180,125 children received child protection services in Australia, including 41,549 Queensland children and young people (a 4.9% increase over the 39,626 in 2021–2022). Queensland’s rate in 2022–2023 of children and young people who were the subject of an investigation of a notification was slightly above the national average (23.0 per 1000 in Queensland vs 21.1 per 1000 nationally) as was its rate of children receiving child protection services (34.4 per 1000 in Queensland vs 31.5 per 1000 nationally).¹³⁷

Figure 5: Rate per 1,000 children and young people receiving child protection services (2022–2023)



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2024). *Child protection Australia*, Table 2.2.

Since 2018–2019, Queensland has seen increases in both the total number and rate of children in OOHC. In 2022–2023, its rate of children in OOHC (8.1 per 1000 children) was slightly higher than the Australia-wide rate (7.9 per 1000 children). Over the same time period, rates increased for children in South Australia, consistently decreased in New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, and remained steady in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.¹³⁸

Queensland spends more on youth justice services than any other jurisdiction, although increases in funding have been primarily spent on detention-based services. For 2024–2025, the Queensland Government announced a youth justice budget of \$481.5 million, a 107.7 per cent increase on the 2023–2024 budget (\$232.0 million).¹³⁹ The capital works program for the DYJ is \$221.1 million in 2024–2025 which is predominantly allocated to the ongoing construction of Woodford Youth Detention Centre and upgrades to other detention centres and service centres. \$261.4 million has been committed to deliver a therapeutic operational model at the Woodford Youth Detention Centre, to ensure young people detained can access rehabilitation programs and support.¹⁴⁰

In 2022–2023, Queensland had the highest spending of any jurisdiction on youth justice services.¹⁴¹ While overall, funding for youth justice services in Queensland has increased by 26.7 per cent, as shown in Table 12, the majority of the increase has funded detention-based services.

Table 12: Real recurrent expenditure on Queensland youth justice services (\$'000), with percentage change

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	5-year increase
Group conferencing	\$7770	\$8628	\$7135	\$7362	\$7486	3.7% decrease
Community-based services	\$145,269	\$162,067	\$136,277	\$124,908	\$143,935	0.9% decrease
Detention-based services	\$130,340	\$134,948	\$172,271	\$227,026	\$207,695	59.3% increase
Total	\$283,379	\$305,643	\$315,683	\$359,297	\$359,116	26.7% increase

Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on government services: Youth justice services Table 17A.10*

In 2022–2023, the cost of one group conference was about the same as 16 nights under community supervision and two nights in youth detention.

What is working well or improving?

Frontline workforce growth and the implementation of demand-based funding to assist with timely responses to growing demand. The most recently available data describing Queensland’s child welfare workforce estimated it to be 3296 FTE including caseworkers, other workers and frontline support.¹⁴² The frontline child protection and family support workforce includes case workers employed by Child Safety, case workers and other staff employed by non-government organisations, and staff within other organisations such as Youth Justice. Other relevant employees include DoE’s student protection principal advisors and staff employed by Queensland Health and QPS within their respective Child Protection Units. It also includes frontline police in the Child Protection and Investigation Units, and Australian Federal Police in child exploitation roles. Our government stakeholders advised they saw value in increasing their agency’s child protection staffing to be able to support more timely and proactive responses for children.

On 13 June 2023, the Queensland Government announced \$11.4 million for 123 additional Child Safety frontline staff.¹⁴³ Demand-based funding has been introduced for the child protection workforce, ensuring that as cases increase, more positions become available. Child Safety reported that between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023, its number of child safety officers consistently remained around 1150 FTE. Between 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 there was a sharp increase (10.5%) and the number of positions increased to 1260.44 FTE.¹⁴⁴ Between 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2024, the average caseload of a full-time Child Safety Officer slightly decreased from 15.8 to 15.4.¹⁴⁵

Investment in frontline workforce remains critical. Our 2024 survey of frontline workers showed that 17 per cent of child safety workers and 19 per cent of youth justice workers intend to leave the sector within the next 12 months.¹⁴⁶

The Queensland child protection and family support workforce remaining committed to supporting children and their families. A committed child protection and family support workforce is crucial to supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families in extremely complex situations with multiple services involved.¹⁴⁷ This workforce must make decisions alongside families, which can be ethically fraught and emotionally challenging, demanding a high level of knowledge and skill.¹⁴⁸ With demand on services increasing, this can also impact their workload and wellbeing. Encouragingly, the majority of respondents to the QFCC’s 2024 survey of the frontline workforce agreed their work serves an important purpose (96%), leads to positive change (77%), and gives them a sense of satisfaction (78%).¹⁴⁹

The effectiveness of child safety interventions. Between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, there has been an increase in the proportion of children and young people who did not experience subsequent substantiations after their initial substantiation. This increase was maintained in the 12 months to 31 March 2024 at just over 85 per cent (Table 13).

Table 13: Number (and %) of individual children and young people who did not experience a further substantiation within 12 months after their first substantiation

	12 months ending					
	30 Jun 2019	30 Jun 2020	30 Jun 2021	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2023	31 Mar 2024
No substantiation after first substantiation	5422 (81.5%)	5830 (82.7%)	6277 (84.3%)	6300 (85.6%)	6487 (85.7%)	6501 (85.3%)

Source: DCSSDS, 2024

What needs further improvement?

The increased demand on the child protection system. Over the past five years there has been an increase in child concern reports (9.4%) and a sharp increase in notifications (34.5%). The number of substantiations has also been consistently growing (a 13.3% increase) as has the number of children in OOHC (a 20.2% increase). By contrast there has been a gradual decrease in the use of intervention with parental agreement (4.3%) (Table 14). Of the 41,549 Queensland children and young people that received a child protection service in 2022–2023, 28,199 (67.9%) had received a service in a prior year.¹⁵⁰

The performance of the Queensland child protection system

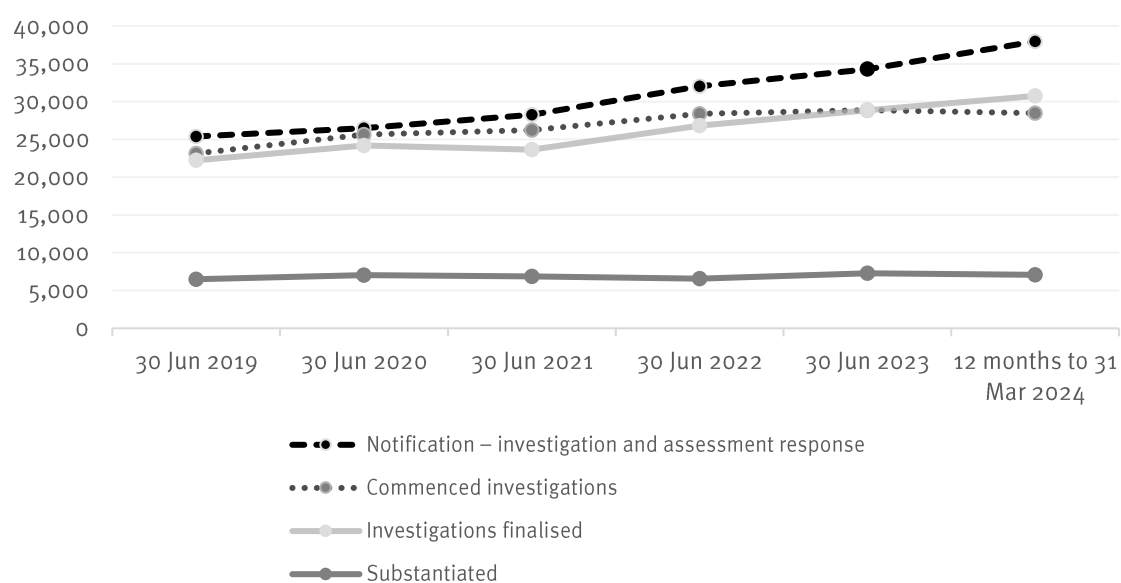
Table 14: Number of individual children and young people subject to DCSSDS interventions

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	5 year trend	1 year trend
Notifications	22,767	23,273	25,233	28,587	30,628	34.5% increase	6.7% increase
Substantiations	6063	6551	6408	6249	6869	13.3% increase	9.9% increase
In OOHC	9647	10,527	11,065	11,323	11,593	20.2% increase	2.4% increase
Intervention with parental agreement	2095	1988	1863	2043	2005	4.3% decrease	1.9% decrease
Entering OOHC	2807	3117	2958	2705	2804	0.1% decrease	3.7% increase
Exiting OOHC	1786	1803	2022	2096	2217	19.4% increase	5.5% increase

Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

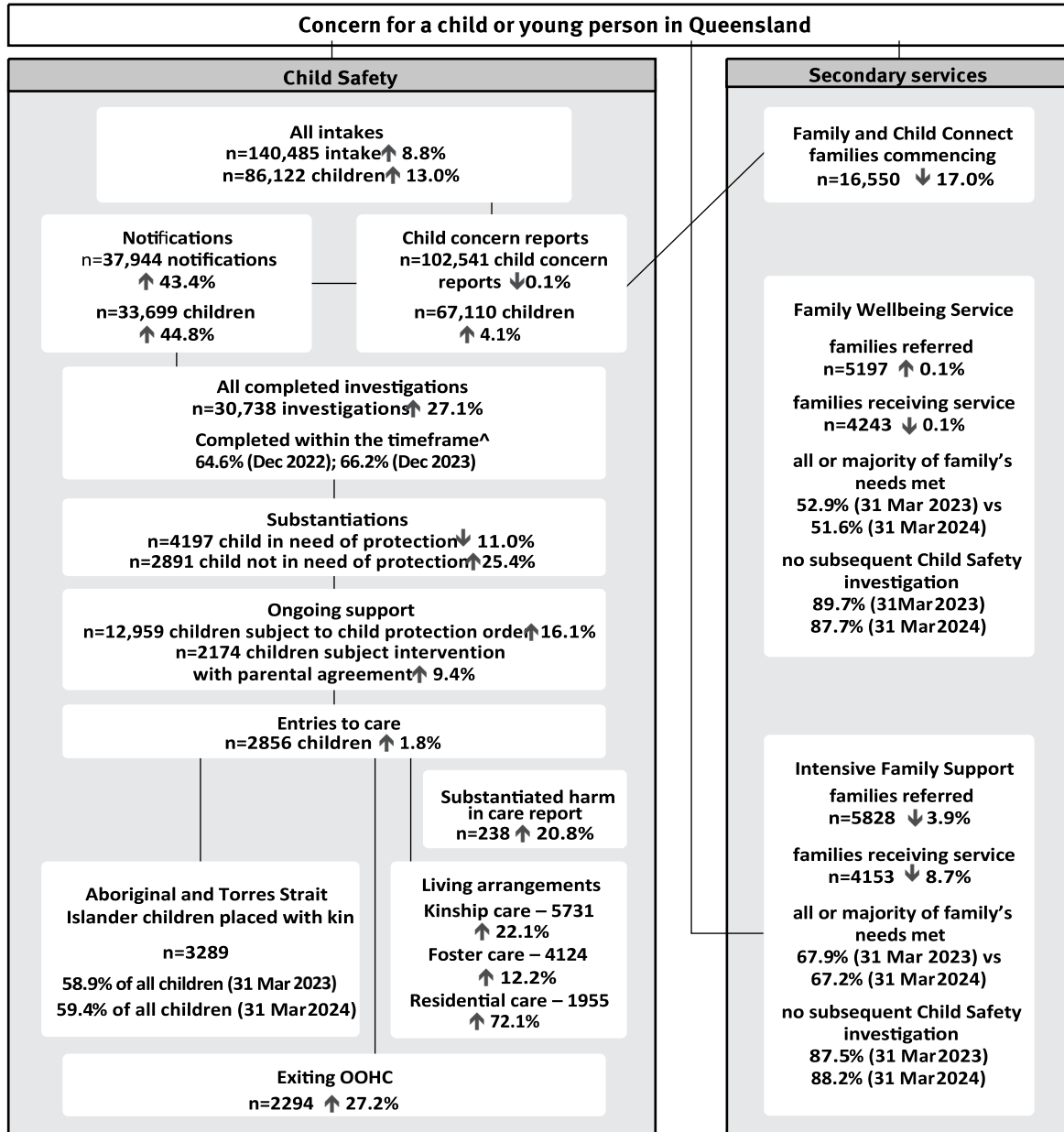
This is a national issue, in part fuelled by increased and multiple reporting about the same children. According to the AIHW,¹⁵¹ in 2021–2022, 275,000 children had 471,000 reports of harm made about them to a state or territory child protection service, but fewer than half were investigated and only 45,500 were substantiated. It has been stated that ‘the volume of notifications is at unsustainable levels’.¹⁵²

Figure 6: Five-year child protection demand trend



Summary of the demand in Queensland’s child protection and family support system

Figure 7: Flow chart with relevant available data for various points of the child protection and family support system (12 months ending 31 March 2024 noting percentage change from 12 month ending 30 June 2020)



Source: DCSSDS (2024)

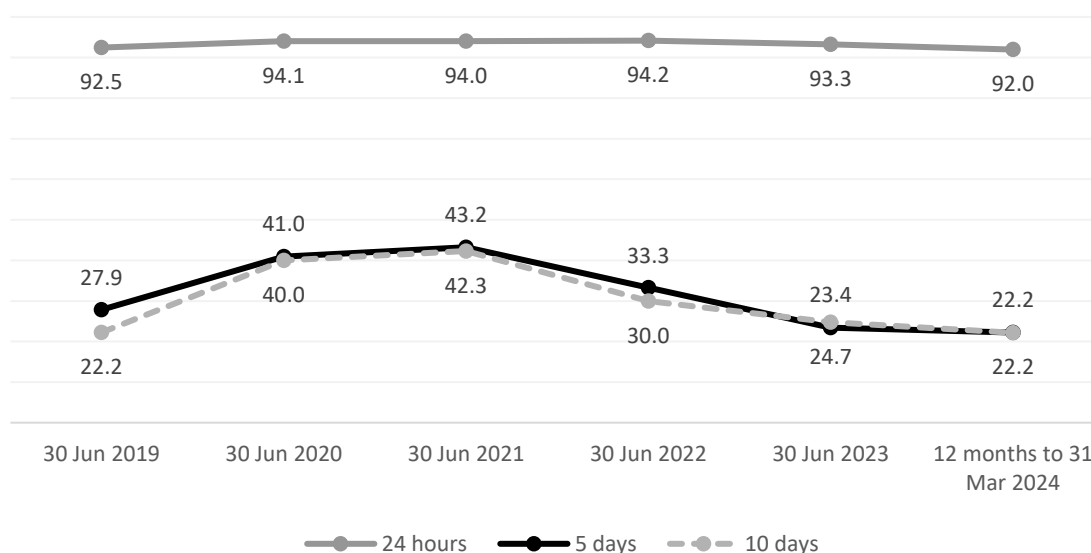
*Data notes: data is for the year ending March 2024 (12 months of data). Unless otherwise stated, percentage change reference point (where relevant) is 12 months ending 30 June 2020. Family and Child Connect services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander FWS and IFS services were implemented from 2017, with new services rolled out over time.

[^] Note: From 1 September 2019, the prescribed timeframe for completing an investigation and assessment changed from 60 calendar days to 100 calendar days.

The growing number of concerns received by Child Safety creating a challenge for the department in investigating and closing cases within response times. The number of cases finalised with the outcome of 'other' has been rapidly growing. An outcome of 'other' means a full investigation was not possible and the case was closed. This may occur in cases where a family has relocated to another state, or the family cannot be located. In the 12 months to 31 March 2024, 5737 cases were closed under this category, almost 10 times more than in the 12 months to 30 June 2019 (606 cases).¹⁵³ Compared to 2018–2019, the increase is 846.7 per cent. This surge follows the introduction of a process in October 2021 (revised in October 2022) allowing investigations to be closed after 100 days without sighting the child if no new information is received, raising concerns about child welfare. In 2023–2024 the Department is likely to close more investigations than it commences.

The increase in Child Safety’s response time to commence investigations after a notification has been received. In September 2021, 12 months after the completion of the *Seeing they are Safe: Responsiveness to 5-day and 10-day notifications of child harm in Queensland review*,¹⁵⁴ the QFCC sought evidence of improvements to timely investigation assessments. While there was variation across Queensland regions, on average it was taking between two and nine weeks to sight a child when a notification was commenced by information only. At 31 March 2023, almost half (45%) of notifications were commenced by information gathering.¹⁵⁵ The most recent data on five-day and 10-day notifications indicates that the percentage of investigations commenced within the timeframe is now slightly worse (five days) or about the same (10 days) as before our review was conducted.¹⁵⁶

Figure 8: Percentage of notifications by whether investigation and assessment commenced within the response timeframe

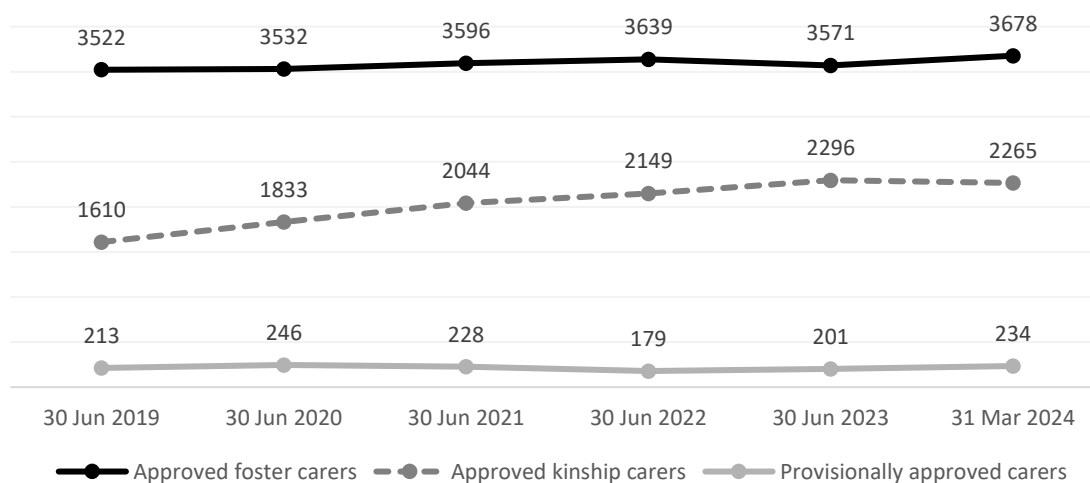


Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

The insufficient amount of carer families compared to the number of children in care. When children and young people cannot live safely at home for a time, foster carers are instrumental in providing temporary, safe and nurturing care in a family-based environment. Consistent with other jurisdictions, due to many households exiting foster care, Queensland continues to experience a shortage of foster carers which results in children and young people being placed in residential care.

Between 30 June 2019 and 31 March 2024 there was a 40.7 per cent increase in kinship carers from 1610 to 2265, however the number of foster carers only increased by 4.4 per cent from 3522 to 3678.¹⁵⁷ Despite significant efforts to recruit new carer families, the number of foster carers leaving the system continues to exceed the number commencing. In the year ending 31 March 2024, there were 346 foster carer commencements and 476 exits meaning the foster carer pool is not growing sufficiently to meet demand.¹⁵⁸ This suggests new recruitment and attraction strategies are not the answer to building the overall carer base, and additional efforts are needed to improve retention. The modest overall increases have not kept pace with the number of children and young people in OOHC.¹⁵⁹ In June 2024, the QFCC conducted a joint project with PeakCare which involved a comprehensive demographic analysis of foster carers in Queensland. Key report findings included a decline in traditional foster carers, demographic shifts impacting availability, and the need for systemic reforms. The report offers actionable opportunities to revitalise the foster care system, emphasising the importance of innovative and flexible approaches to foster carer recruitment, improved support systems, and greater flexibility for potential carers. The report concluded that collaborative efforts involving all stakeholders are essential to revitalise this crucial part of the child protection system.

Figure 9: Queensland carer household trends



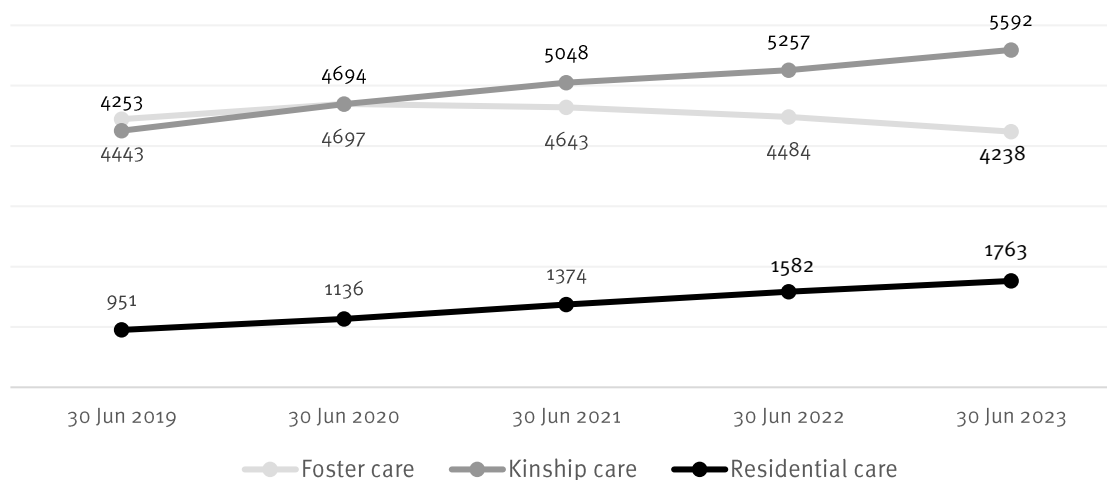
Source: DCSSDS (2024). *Our Performance* (website).

Findings from the 2022–2023 *Queensland Foster and Kinship Care survey* of 155 Queensland exiting carers include that 39 per cent of kinship carers ceased their role due to reasons relating to Child Safety and 49 per cent of foster carers exited due to reasons relating to themselves and their family. A quarter of exiting kinship and foster carers were very dissatisfied with Child Safety’s engagement and response. Among all exiting carers, 38 per cent would not advise a friend to be a carer and 38 per cent would not return to the carer role later in their life. Interestingly, among respondents to our 2024 Community Survey, 39 per cent agreed they would consider becoming a foster or kinship carer and 86 per cent agreed they would take in a friend’s child in a time of emergency.¹⁶⁰ A concern we regularly hear from foster and kinship carers is related to the rising cost of living. In 2023 the QFCC conducted a review into the carer allowance in Queensland to gauge whether it was sufficient. The findings

suggested that, while the allowance has increased in line with the Consumer Price Index, it is still falling short of what carers need.

The ongoing shortage of foster carers is causing more Queensland children to be raised in residential care. Over the past five years, the number of children living in OOHC has risen and the greatest increases have been for children placed in residential care. Between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023, the number of children placed in foster care decreased by 246 while the number placed in residential care increased by 181 children. Of the 1763 children in residential care as at 30 June 2023, 1.8 per cent were aged 0–4 years, 15.9 per cent were aged 5–9 years, 44.5 per cent were aged 10–14 years and 37.8 per cent were aged 15–17 years. The majority of young people aged 15–17 years (71.7%) who entered OOHC in 2022–2023 were placed in residential care. Queensland provides 41 per cent of Australia’s residential care placements despite only having 22 per cent of the nation’s children living in OOHC. For children 0–17 years, Queensland now has the lowest rate of children placed in family-based care in Australia. Queensland’s rates of family-based care are particularly low for young people aged 12–17 years (63.2% versus 78.4% Australia wide).

Figure 10: Number of children and young people living in OOHC, by placement type



Source: DCSSDS (2024). Our performance website.

The significant negative impacts of being raised in residential care were gathered during the 2024 residential care review, through both the QFCC lived experience panel and the Department’s *My life in care survey*, which although not a representative sample, showed that young people in residential care have demonstratively less access to necessities, are less likely to feel cared for or able to tell their carer when they are worried and have less privacy.

Table 15: 2023 *My life in care* survey items

Survey question*	Kinship care	Foster care	Residential care
I have the things I need to live comfortably	92.6%	95.8%	78.7%
I have access to tampons/pads	91.4%	87.6%	78.6%
I have access to underwear, socks and bras	91.9%	95.3%	76.3%
I have access to Wi-Fi	88.6%	89.7%	59.0%
I feel that I can tell the person who looks after me when I am worried	73.5%	77.8%	50.4%
I feel that people care about me	85.9%	87.9%	57.4%
I have the privacy I need	88.6%	86.9%	68.9%

Source: DCSSDS (2023). *My life in care* (unpublished survey)

* Response percentages include those who selected 'always' or 'most of the time'

Due to the rising numbers of children and young people in residential care, complaints of sexual exploitation and predation, and community concerns about youth justice incidents, Child Safety partnered with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) and PeakCare to deliver a review of the residential care system. Commissioner Twyford provided independent oversight and strategic advice. The review revealed significant challenges, including young people feeling unable to lead normal lives due to restrictive policies, mismatches with youth workers, lack of a sense of home, and difficulties engaging with culture and community.¹⁶¹ The review is complete, and the *Residential Care Roadmap* with 31 specific actions that government has committed to take is now public and being implemented.¹⁶² Despite this plan, since the government announced its review, the number of children in residential care placements has increased from 1759 and is now, at the end of 2023–2024, approaching 2000 children.¹⁶³

Sustainability challenges among residential care providers pose significant risks to the delivery of consistent, high-quality care for children and young people. Over the last 12 months the expenditure and number of individual providers of residential care services in Queensland has grown. As of 30 April 2024, there were 168 residential care service providers; by comparison, there were 150 residential care service providers at the same time in 2023. As of 30 April 2024, Child Safety invested \$898 million, compared to \$761 million at the same time in 2023.¹⁶⁴

The increased funding and increased number of care providers also indicates a structural change towards more, smaller care providers that are less likely to have capacity to respond to urgent demand surges. Over the last 12 months two major providers of care in Queensland have ceased their operations, resulting in urgent and reactive changes to respond to the children and young people and their carers. At the time of closure, one of these providers was providing care to 863 children and young people and supporting 488 foster and kinship carers. PeakCare has advised that service provider exits were driven by funding to the sector not keeping pace with the increasing costs of service delivery.¹⁶⁵

As part of the Residential care review the government has invested over \$3 million in a sector-led Workforce Strategy to improve services and outcomes for children and young people in

residential care. Advice provided to the QFCC by stakeholders as part of the QFCC's Review of Residential Care was that sector providers needed to be properly resourced to provide training to boost their knowledge and capability, wellbeing support and to be able to create stable care teams.^{166,167}

Queensland continuing to operate without Child Safe Standards or a RCS. The QFCC acknowledges the work undertaken in developing the *Child Safe Organisations Bill 2024*¹⁶⁸ to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission and emphasises the importance of timely implementation of this system in Queensland to respond to the needs of our children and young people and contribute to a nationally consistent child safe model. In the seven years since delivery of the Royal Commission's Final Report,¹⁶⁹ Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales have implemented coordinated child safe standards and RCSs.

Analysis of police data prepared for the Royal Commission suggested that child sexual abuse in contemporary institutional contexts accounts for approximately five per cent of all child sexual abuse reported to police.¹⁷⁰ Data collected through the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2021–2022 Personal Safety Survey estimates there are at least 195,200 people in Australia who were sexually abused before the age of 15 within an institution by trusted adults including foster carers, doctors, nurses, disability support workers teachers, priests and ministers, residential carers or youth justice workers.¹⁷¹ The National Redress Scheme provides support to people who experienced institutional child sexual abuse. Queensland's participation has involved a financial provision at 30 June 2024 estimated at \$409.4 million.¹⁷² In our 2024 workforce survey 83 per cent of respondents agreed that their organisation is Child Safe. This is a significant increase from 78 per cent in the 2023 survey.

Attention to concerns about the whereabouts of children in care. As at 31 December 2022, there were an estimated 833 Queensland children in care staying at a place that was not their approved placement. This represents 7.6 per cent of all children involved with Child Safety. For more than nine years, the research has shown that children reported as absent or missing from care are at risk of a range of sexual harms, including exploitation, abuse, assault and rape.¹⁷³ Rates as high as two out of five children and young people in residential care report having been a victim or at risk of child sexual exploitation.¹⁷⁴ Behind these figures there are children whose futures are potentially forever altered at the hands of an adult who exploits them. We can and must do more to prevent, protect and respond to child sexual exploitation. Queensland took a big step forward with the release of *Safe & Sound in Queensland: Enhancing safety for young people who go missing from care*, a toolkit for workers who have an opportunity to prevent young people leaving their care placement.¹⁷⁵ The importance of this work was highlighted by a recent news article describing a QPS operation in Cairns which uncovered the exploitation of 54 children aged 11 years and older, many of whom had youth justice involvement.¹⁷⁶

The growing proportion of Queensland’s child protection and family support budget funding OOHc rather than early intervention services. While overall, funding for both family support and child protection services in Queensland has increased, in 2019–2020, 57.9 per cent of Queensland’s child protection and family support budget was spent on the provision of OOHc and other supported placement services. By 2022–2023 this had risen to 72.1 per cent.¹⁷⁷ This indicates an increasing trend towards crisis responses in child protection, rather than early intervention through family support that can reduce entry into the statutory system. The per child costs of crisis responses are significantly higher than earlier intervention, and without a deliberate commitment to increase early intervention, crisis responses and costs will continue to escalate. A placement cost of \$341 per night (in 2022–2023) equates to \$124,465 over one year, resulting in an annual cost to accommodate a child in OOHc which is about 15 times as much as the provision of a family support service.

While the average cost per night to place a child in an OOHc placement was \$341 the cost to place a child in a residential care service can be much higher than a foster or kinship care placement. Figures tabled in Queensland Parliament indicated that one child with high needs cost \$1.9 million per annum to place.¹⁷⁸ In 2023–2024 the average cost of a foster or kinship care placement was \$48 per night (\$17,520 per annum) while the average cost of a residential care placement was \$1192 per night (\$435,080 per annum).¹⁷⁹

Ongoing challenges with attracting, supporting and retaining frontline staff. While staff vacancy rates have been an ongoing issue there is recent evidence of improvements. The child protection and family support workforce continue to report feeling strained. Results from the QFCC’s 2024 survey of frontline workers indicates that workload demands have worsened year-on-year. Only 45 per cent agreed their workload was manageable (compared to 57% in 2022, and 47% in our 2023 survey); 32 per cent agreed they were able to spend enough time with children, young people and their families to do their job well (compared to 30% in our 2023 survey), 53 per cent agreed they received the right amount of professional supervision to do their job well (slightly up from 49% in 2023); and 75 per cent agreed they received support from their colleagues/peers to do their job well (down from 87% in 2022, but consistent with 75% recorded in 2023). A further 39 per cent of respondents said they would recommend working in the sector to others and 16 per cent said they were intending to leave the sector in the next 12 months.¹⁸⁰ Between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, the Queensland-wide Child Safety Officer vacancy rate rose from 68.54 FTE to 218.55 FTE. Over the past 12 months, however, it has dropped 43.8 per cent to 122.72 FTE.¹⁸¹

There is no evidence of improvement in the issues identified in the *2021–2022 Child Death Review Board Annual Report*, including agencies and services competing for staff and disparities in remuneration, incentives and leave provisions across government and non-government sectors creating increased staff movement with these issues being amplified in First Nations, rural and remote communities.¹⁸² Consistent with the Board findings our 2024 Principle Focus work identified that several ATSICCOs were reporting high vacancy rates and an inability to meet community demand.¹⁸³ These workforce shortfalls will be the focus of a discovery review project in 2024–2025 to investigate what more might be done to address this in a more strategic way.

Goal 3: Queensland's OOHC and Youth Justice systems are upholding the rights of the children and young people they serve

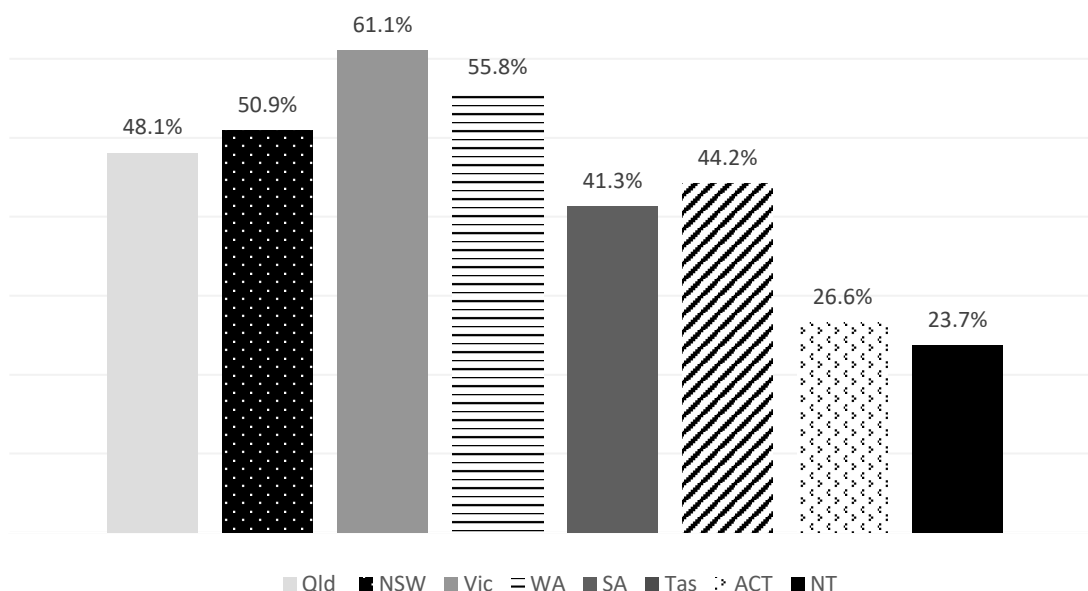
When children are not able to remain safely at home, placing them in home-based care is considered to be in their best interests. OOHC that is safe and stable can help children and young people recover from experiences of maltreatment and most young people with care experiences go on to lead fulfilling lives. Overall, however, children and young people in care are more likely than others to experience homelessness, criminal justice interventions, unemployment, and less optimal physical, mental and educational outcomes. This emphasises the need for our Child Safety system to be responsive to the rights and wellbeing of children in care.

Likewise, when a child engages in criminal behaviour, the Youth Justice system is intended to keep the community safe while addressing the underlying causes of the behaviour to prevent future reoffending. The Youth Justice system should address the full spectrum of interventions, from early intervention and prevention efforts, through to detention and support following an experience of incarceration. The *Youth Justice Act 1992* recognises the importance of the provision of services designed to rehabilitate and reintegrate children and young people who commit offences. Young people exposed to the Youth Justice system are too often treated as individuals, yet we know that unaddressed, significant family adversity remains a precursor to youth justice exposure. Consequently, in our work we also consider the families that are exposed to the Youth Justice system.

How does Queensland compare?

Queensland children and young people in OOHC experience more placements than children in some other states. In 2022–2023, 48.1 per cent of Queensland's children and young people on a child protection order had exited care after 12 months or more with only one or two placements. Victoria had the greatest proportion of children and young people with only one or two placements (61.1%).¹⁸⁴ While the proportion is low, it has been steadily improving since 2018–2019 when the Queensland rate was 37.8 per cent. The QFCC is planning a review to better understand factors affecting the placement stability of Queensland children which we hope will provide important information to improve stability for children in OOHC.

Figure 11: A comparison across Australian jurisdictions of the percentage of children and young people on a child protection order and exiting care after 12 months or more with only one or two placements (2022–2023)

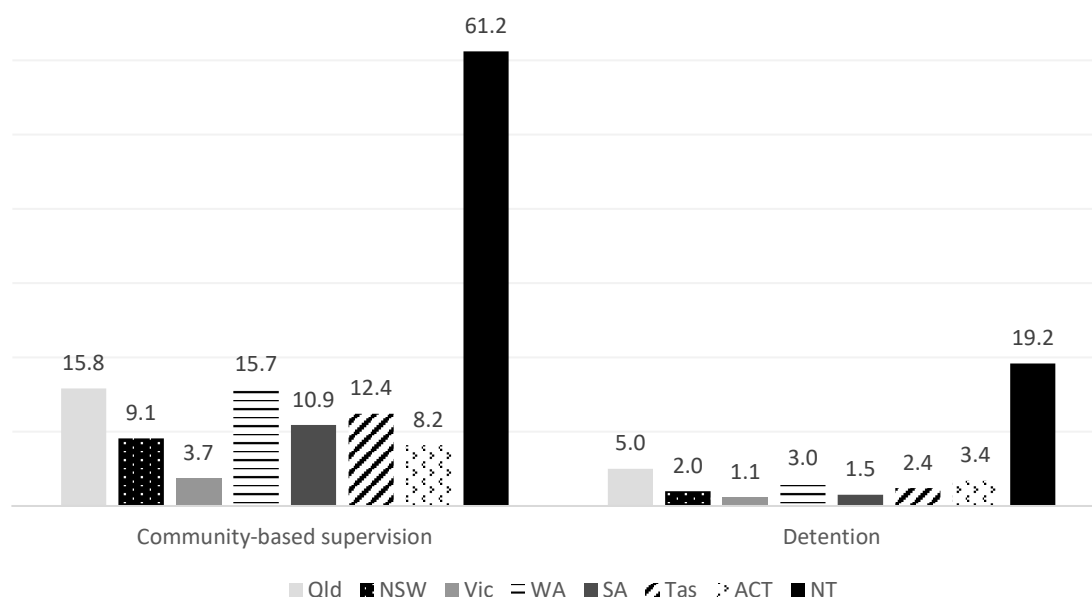


Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on government services: Child protection services Table 16A.16*

Queensland continues to have a higher percentage of children and young people in OOHC meeting national reading standards compared to other reporting jurisdictions. Of the three jurisdictions that provided data in 2023, the percentage of year five children subject to guardianship/custody orders who achieved at or above the national minimum standard for reading were highest for Queensland (73.0%) followed by Western Australia (68.2%) and South Australia (62.4%).¹⁸⁵ The percentage of children and young people with a current education support plan has increased significantly over the past five years from 55.1 per cent in 2018–2019 to 80.5 per cent in 2022–2023.¹⁸⁶

Queensland detains up more children than any other state, has the highest rates of unsentenced detention and leads the nation for nights spent in custody. During 2022–2023, Queensland had the second highest rate of young people in youth justice custody on an average day (5.0 per 10,000) and the second highest rate of young people under community-based supervision on an average day (15.8 per 10,000), behind the Northern Territory (Figure 12).¹⁸⁷

Figure 12: A comparison across Australian jurisdictions of the rate of young people aged 10–17 per 10,000 in community-based supervision and youth justice detention (2022–2023)

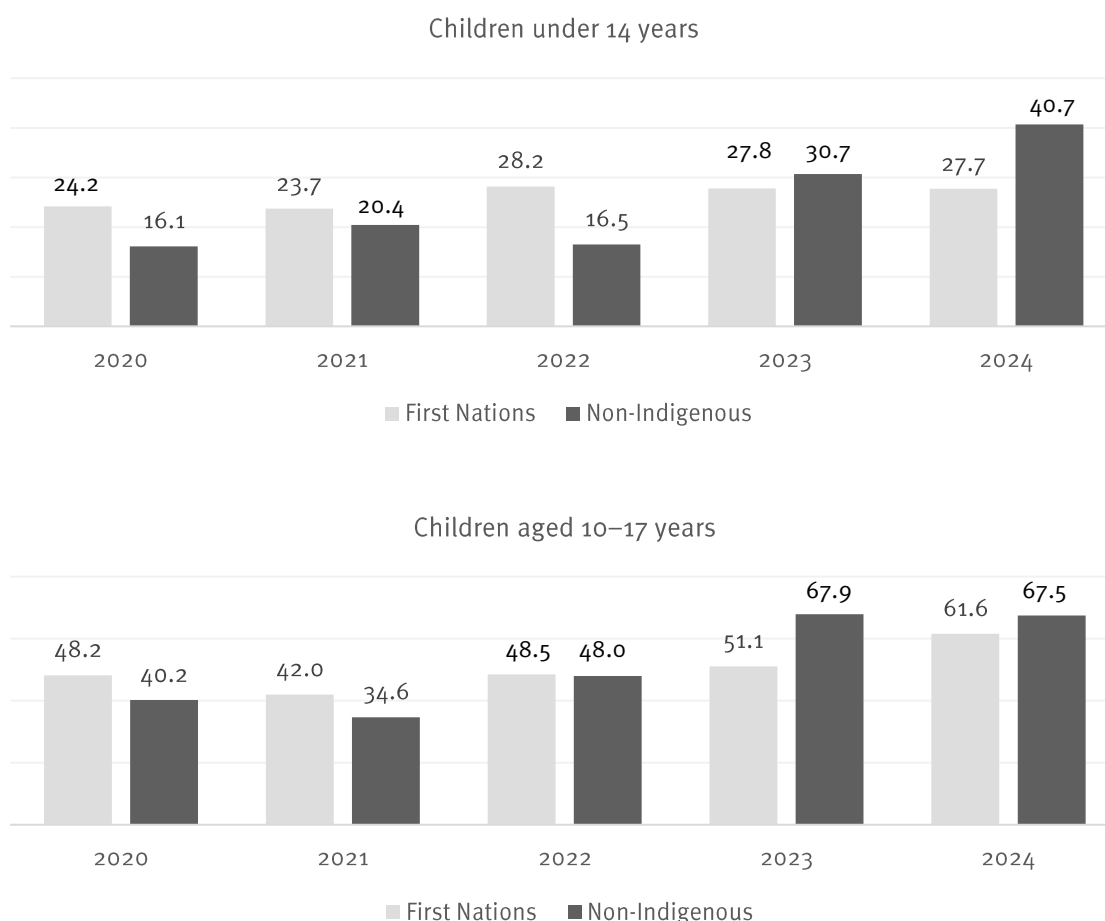


Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on government services: Child protection services Table 17A.1*

On an average night in the June quarter 2023, 306 Queensland young people aged 10–17 years were in a youth detention centre.¹⁸⁸ This was the highest of all jurisdictions followed by New South Wales (186) and Victoria (100). Australian Capital Territory had the fewest (15). During 2022–2023, Queensland children spent the most nights in custody (103,399 total), followed by 71,298 total custody nights in New South Wales and 39,499 total custody nights in Victoria. More than a third of the national nights in custody were served by Queensland children.¹⁸⁹

Figure 13 presents changes in the average number of nights children spent in Queensland youth detention centres between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024 for children under 14 years and for all children aged 10 to 17 years. For both age groups, the average number of nights has increased over this time period. Since the year ending 31 March 2023, on average non-Indigenous children have been spending more nights in youth detention than First Nations children.

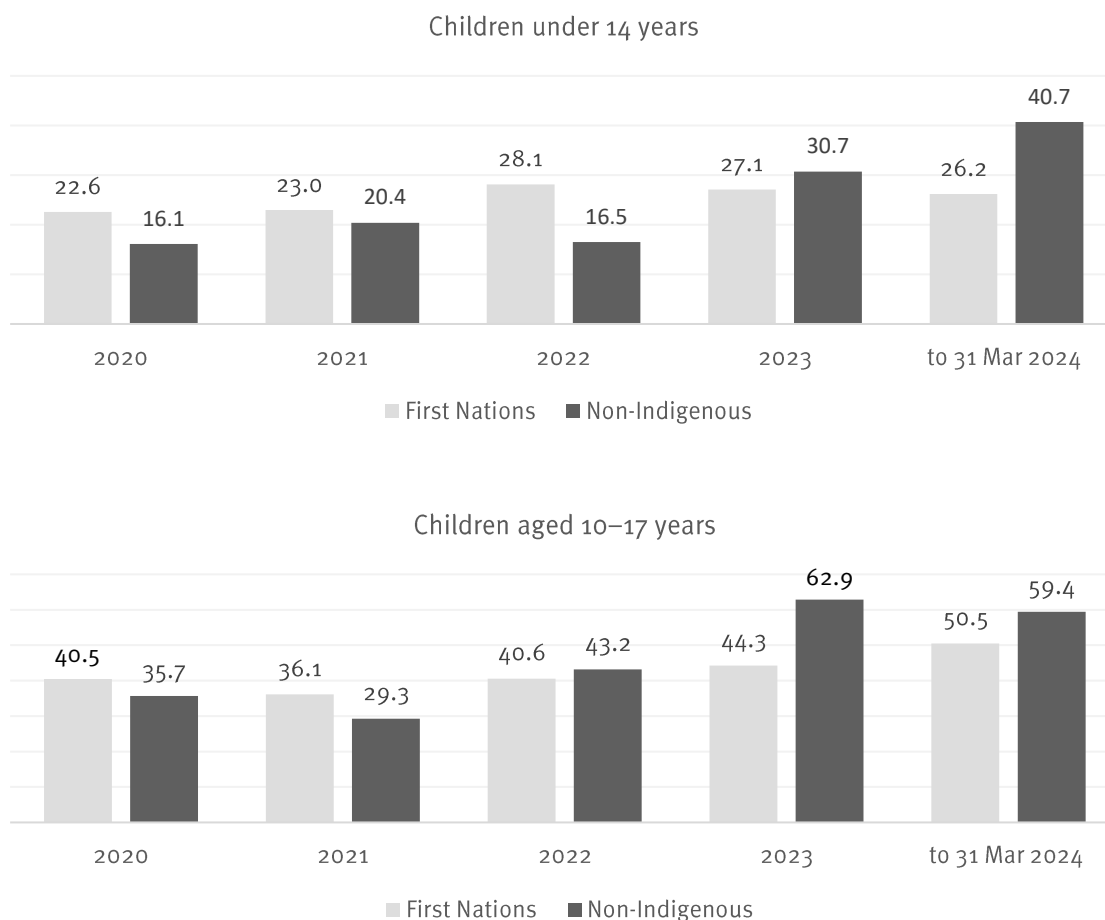
Figure 13: Average number of nights in a Youth Detention Centre, by First Nations status for children under 14 years and children aged 10–17 years



Source: DYJ, unpublished data request, 2024.

On an average day, 267 Queensland young people (87.4%) were in a youth detention centre on unsentenced detention. Queensland had the highest rate of unsentenced detention ahead of Tasmania (82.6%), Victoria (70.4%) and New South Wales (68.4%).^{190, 191} Figure 14 presents changes in the average number of nights children spent in unsentenced detention in Queensland youth detention centres between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024 for children under 14-years and for all children aged 10 to 17 years. For both age groups, the average number of nights has increased over this time period. Since the year ending 31 March 2023, on average non-Indigenous children have been spending more nights in youth detention on unsentenced detention than First Nations children. The average number of days First Nations children spent in unsentenced custody increased by 10.0 days from 40.5 to 50.5 while for non-Indigenous children, the increase was 23.7 days from 35.7 to 59.4. When the time children spent in detention waiting to be sentenced was considered, half of those sentenced were not required to serve further time in custody.¹⁹²

Figure 14: Average number of nights in unsentenced detention in a Youth Detention Centre, by First Nations status for children under 14 years and children aged 10–17 years



Source: DYJ, unpublished data request, 2024.

What is working well or improving?

Most children and young people living in OOHC reported they feel cared for, safe and secure and happy. In 2022 and 2023, the Queensland *My Life in Care* survey captured the experiences of 10–18 year olds living in OOHC, most of whom were living in kinship or foster care (70% in 2022 and 72% in 2023).^{193,194} Table 16 compares survey results across both years of the survey, showing that rates of young people feeling cared for, safe and secure and happy are generally either consistent across the two time periods or slightly improving.

Table 16: Young people’s responses to select *My Life in Care* survey items (2022 and 2023)

	2022 % agree	2023 % agree
Felt sad prior to entering care	55%	49%
Felt scared prior to entering care	57%	58%
Feeling relaxed in care	55%	50%
Feeling safe in care	64%	66%
Feeling happy in care	70%	71%
Feel safe and secure in current placement	88%	89%
Feel as though people care for them in their current placement	78%	82%
Feel as though they have someone in their lives they can trust	94%	96%
In the past week felt happy	69%	74%
In the past week felt calm	64%	70%
In the past week enjoyed their day	68%	71%
Have privacy in their placement	82%	88%
Have the things they need to feel comfortable in their placement	89%	89%
Participated in recreational activities	98%	97%
Played a sport at least sometimes*	91%	80%

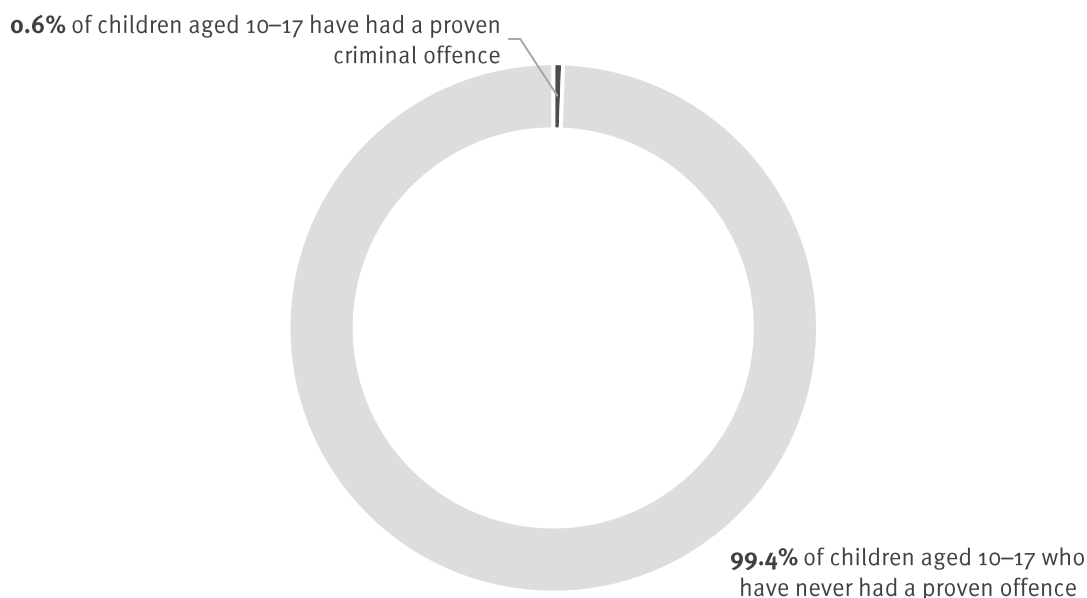
*Response options changed slightly between 2022 and 2023.

The number of children and young people in care receiving NDIS support has almost tripled.

As at 31 March 2024, 3372 Queensland children and young people in OOHC had a verified disability. Additionally a growing number of children and young people in contact with Child Safety receive NDIS support. Between 30 June 2019 and 30 June 2024, the number of children and young people subject to ongoing intervention (either a child protection order or intervention with parental agreement) with an NDIS support plan almost tripled, rising from 1204 to 3553.

Most young Queenslanders obey the law. There are over 570,000 young people aged 10 to 17 in Queensland,¹⁹⁵ and most will never have an interaction with the Youth Justice system. Less than one per cent of the population aged 10 to 17 (around 4000 Queensland children per year) will have youth justice contact.¹⁹⁶

Figure 15: Percentage of Queensland children aged 10–17 with and without a proven offence (2023–2024)



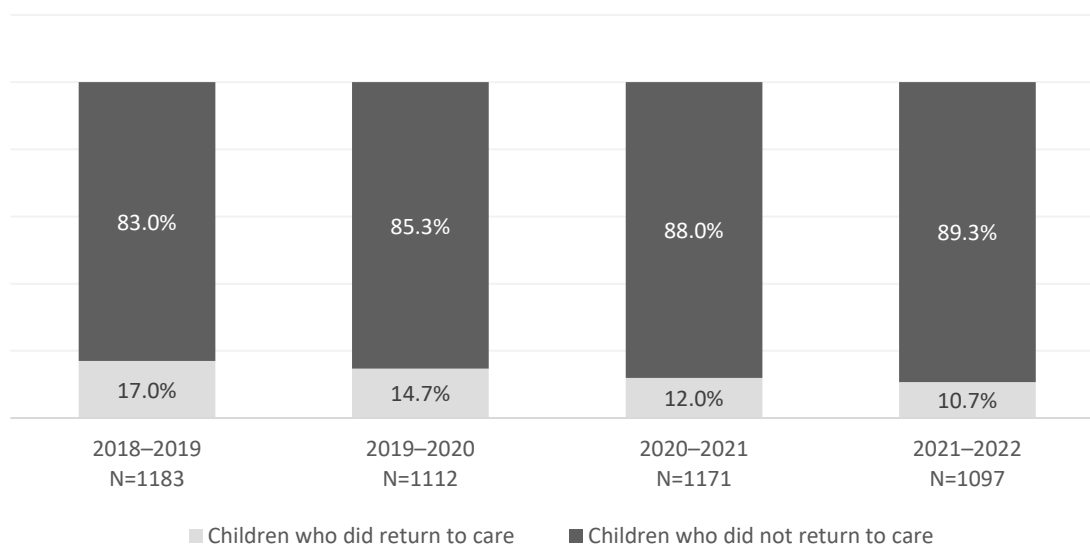
Source: QFCC (2024). Exiting detention community summary¹⁹⁷

Queensland has measures in place to support the safety and wellbeing of children in OOHC. In 2022–2023, the OPG conducted 23,789 visits to 9909 children and young people at visitable locations.¹⁹⁸ The majority of frontline workers who responded to our 2024 workforce survey believed that within their organisation the views of children and young people are listened to and valued (75%) and that decisions are made in children’s and young people’s best interests (77%).

The *Community Safety Plan for Queensland* was launched in April 2024 includes a range of funded initiatives targeting the root causes of crime. The plan includes \$261.4 million to establish a new therapeutic operating model at Woodford Youth Detention Centre to provide rehabilitation services aimed at reducing offender recidivism. It also includes a \$267.5 million investment in the 2023–2024 State Budget for a range of initiatives to target the root causes of youth crime including Intensive Case Management and Intensive On Country programs. The Intensive On Country program is intended to deliver supports to young people and their families to deal with a range of needs that contribute to offending including mental and physical health, substance misuse and accessing accommodation. Further funding is also being invested in evidence-based programs targeting the root causes of crime.¹⁹⁹

The number of children and young people exiting OOHC to a permanency arrangement has decreased slightly—but they were less likely to return to care. The number of children and young people exiting care to a permanency arrangement on a year-on-year basis has been reducing since 2018–2019 (7.3% decrease). However, among those children who exited, the percentage who did not return to care within 12 months has increased from 83.0 per cent in 2018–2019 to 89.3 per cent in 2021–2022 (Figure 16). In 2021–2022 in comparison with other states, Queensland’s rates of successful exits (89.3%) was lower than the rate for South Australia (96.0%), New South Wales (94.5%), Tasmania (93.3%) and Western Australia (92.0%) but was higher than other jurisdictions.

Figure 16: The number of Queensland children aged 0–16 years exiting OOHC to a permanency arrangement by return status



Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on Government Services*²⁰⁰

The extension of support to children and young people leaving OOHC has improved. In the year ending 31 March 2024, 477 young people aged out of OOHC.²⁰¹ Commencing 1 July 2023, young people leaving OOHC have been eligible for Extended Post Care Support. Extended Post Care Support includes ongoing funding of the carer allowance to foster and kinship carers for young people who remain living with their carer family or financial assistance of up to \$16,000 per year paid directly to young people who are living independently.²⁰² In January 2024, an ABC news broadcast, informed by data from Child Safety, reported that only around one-third of the 600 young care leavers eligible for the support had accessed it. Based on feedback from both young people entitled to the support and the sector, the Commission raised concerns about implementation delays, underestimated demand calculations, funding issues, information sharing barriers and a referral form that was still being finalised.²⁰³ In response, Child Safety quickly met with the sector and the impacted young people and promptly took corrective action to remediate these concerns. In June 2024, 345 carers who were caring for 18- and 19-

year-olds who had remained living with them were continuing to receive the carer allowance and a further 331 young people were accessing independent living support. Over the 2023–2024 financial year, expenditure for this extension to the carer allowance was \$5.13 million. The program has been extended in the 2024–2025 budget.

Diversions approaches are used more often and are an important component of effective responses to youth offending. Between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023, the number of cautions administered by QPS increased slightly (3.1%) from 14,700 to 15,163 while the number of police-ordered restorative justice conferences was slightly lower (1.5%) reducing from 2085 to 2053.²⁰⁴ Research evidence suggests that the increased use of diversionary approaches such as cautions and restorative justice conferences has played a significant role in the decline in offender numbers both in Australia and internationally. Diversionary approaches reduce the potential criminalising effect of contact with the criminal justice system and subsequent reoffending²⁰⁵ and have been found to be particularly effective for young people engaged in low level offending.²⁰⁶ While it is pleasing to see these small improvements in the uptake of diversionary measures, we also note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are less likely to be diverted than non-Indigenous children, and this is an area of focus for both the QPS and the QFCC.

What needs further improvement?

The number of children entering care exceeding the number exiting and children staying in the system for longer. There has been a marked increase in children exiting care since 2018–2019 although the number of entries continues to exceed the number of exits. In 2022–2023, the total number of children and young people entering OOHC was 2804 versus 2217 exiting OOHC, a difference of 587 children. While entries to care had been decreasing since their peak in 2019–2020, between 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 there was a 3.7 per cent increase in the number of children entering OOHC and entry numbers have returned to around pre-COVID levels (Table 17).

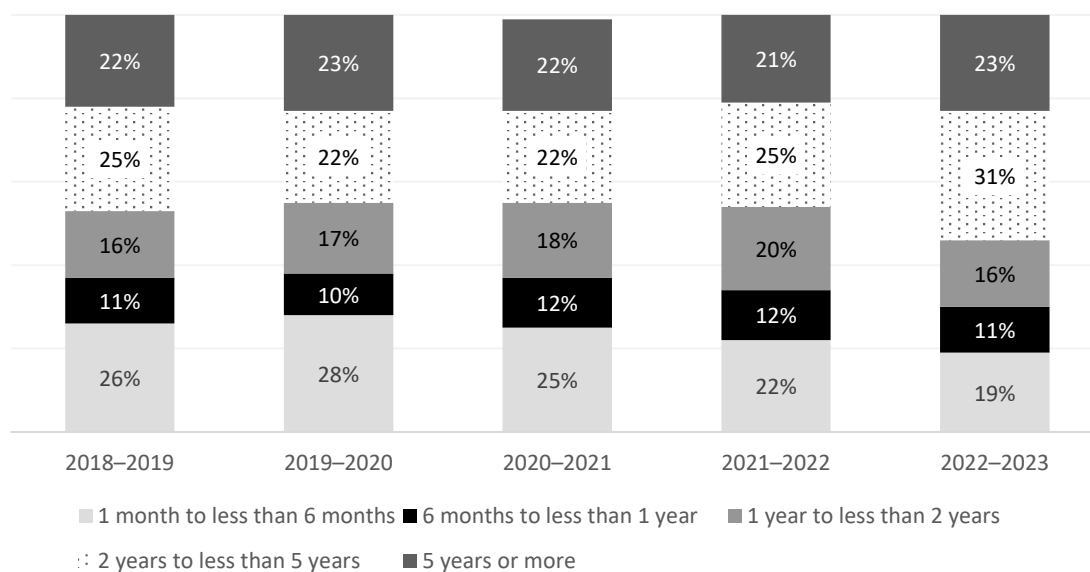
Table 17: Number of children entering and exiting OOHC

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	Year ending 31 March 2024	5 year change (2018–2019 to 2022–2023)
Entries to care	2807	3117	2958	2705	2804	2856	0.1% decrease
Exits from care	1786	1803	2022	2096	2217	2294	24.1% increase

Source: DCSSDS, unpublished data request, 2024.

Another factor driving demand is that Queensland children are spending longer in care. As shown in Figure 17, between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023, the proportion of children aged 0–17 years who exited having spent less than six months in care dropped from 26 per cent to 19 per cent while the proportion spending two to five years in care increased from 25 to 31 per cent.

Figure 17: Trends in the proportion of children aged 0–17 years who exited care during the year by length of time spent in care



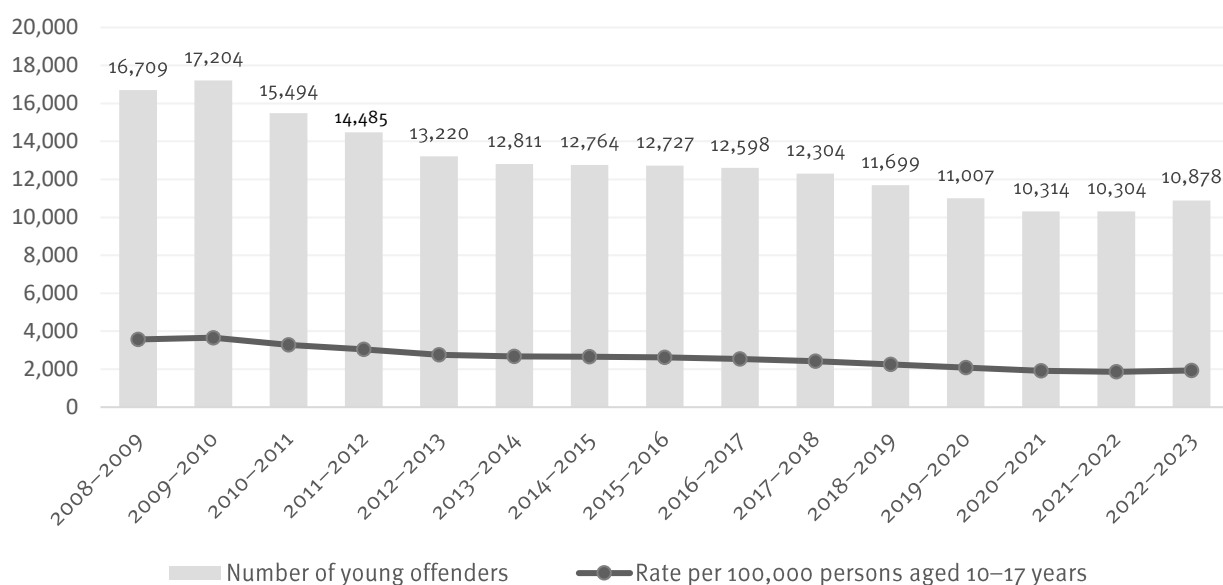
Source: Productivity Commission (2024). *Report on Government Services*

Significantly increased substantiated abuse cases in OOHC. For the 12 months ending 31 March 2024, 238 Queensland children and young people in OOHC were the subject of substantiated harm reports, an increase of 41 cases or 20.8 per cent from the 12 months ending 31 March 2023.²⁰⁷ In 2022–2023, 1.5 per cent of Queensland children experienced substantiated abuse while they were living in OOHC, which was the third lowest behind the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania. The proportion of Queensland children with substantiated harm reports remained relatively stable from 2018–2019 to 2022–2023, ranging between 1.2 per cent and 1.7 per cent.²⁰⁸

The small number of children and young people experiencing crime victimisation and the overlap between victimisation and offending. In May 2024, among children and young people aged 0–17 years, 781 females and 557 males were recorded as victims of offences against the person (violent offences).²⁰⁹ The Childrens Court of Queensland in its 2022–2023 Annual Report highlighted that 47.9 per cent of victims of personal offences were 18 years or younger with 25 per cent aged 10 to 14 years while young males aged 10 to 14 were the most prevalent group of victims of robbery and related offences.²¹⁰ A recent Queensland report which used police administrative data to examine the overlap between victimisation and offending among young people aged six to 17 years found that 32.7 per cent of children and young people with experiences of victimisation had also had police contact in relation to offending. Rates of overlap were higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (59.0%) versus non-Indigenous young people (29.7%).²¹¹

The community’s concern about youth crime is high whilst overall there is a smaller number of offenders. A common theme currently reported by the media is that Queensland is in the midst of a youth crime crisis. QFCC’s media analysis in 2024 showed one quarter of media reports about youth crime included the word “crisis”.²¹² QPS has stated there is ongoing fear of crime within the Queensland community suggesting there’s more work to do to respond to community concerns.²¹³ In 2024, the QFCC’s *Community Perceptions Survey 2023* report confirmed this and found that close to one in five respondents considered crime and youth crime a key issue for parents and children in Queensland. Rates were highest among respondents living in the Far North region (27% versus 19% Queensland-wide).²¹⁴ As shown in Figure 18, there has been a 34.9 per cent decrease in the number of unique young offenders proceeded against by QPS since 2008–2009. Between 2008–2009 and 2022–2023, the number of young offenders aged 10 to 17 years proceeded against by police decreased from 16,709 to 10,878. The rate per 100,000 persons aged 10 to 17 years has also dropped from 3575.8 to 1924.5 (see Figure 18).

Figure 18: A comparison of the number of youth offenders aged 10–17 years and the rate per 100,000 persons aged 10–17 years

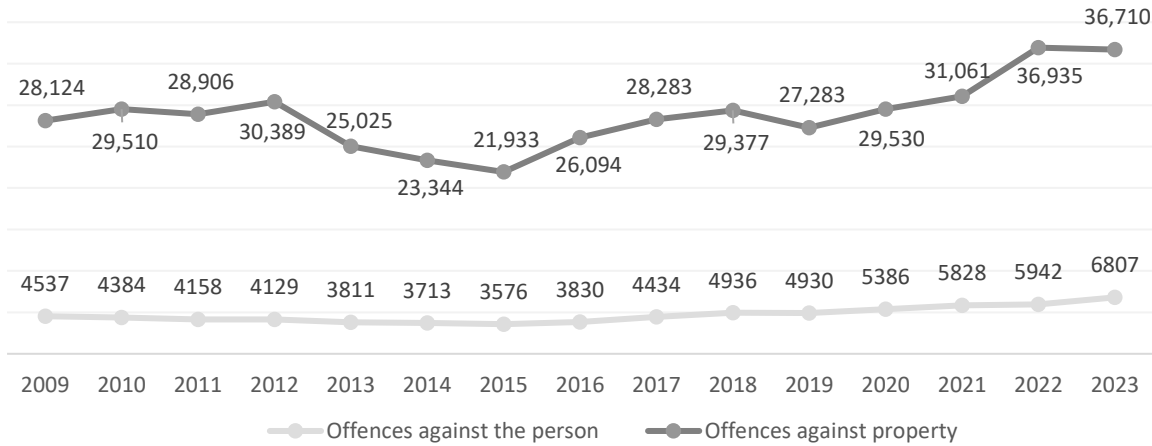


Source Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024). Recorded crime - offenders

According to QPS data, the number of unique offenders aged 10 to 17 years in Queensland has been decreasing since 2009, while the number of offences perpetrated by young offenders has been increasing over the same time period.^{ii, 215} Figure 19 shows a 30.5 per cent increase in property offences and a 50.0 per cent increase in violent offences perpetrated by young offenders in Queensland between 2009 and 2023.

ⁱⁱ Data sourced from the QPS is their reported offender data, which is based on offence counts rather than individuals. It refers to the number of offences cleared or solved through an ‘action against an offender’. An ‘action against an offender’ can include arrest, summons, notice to appear, warrant, caution, community conference and other action.

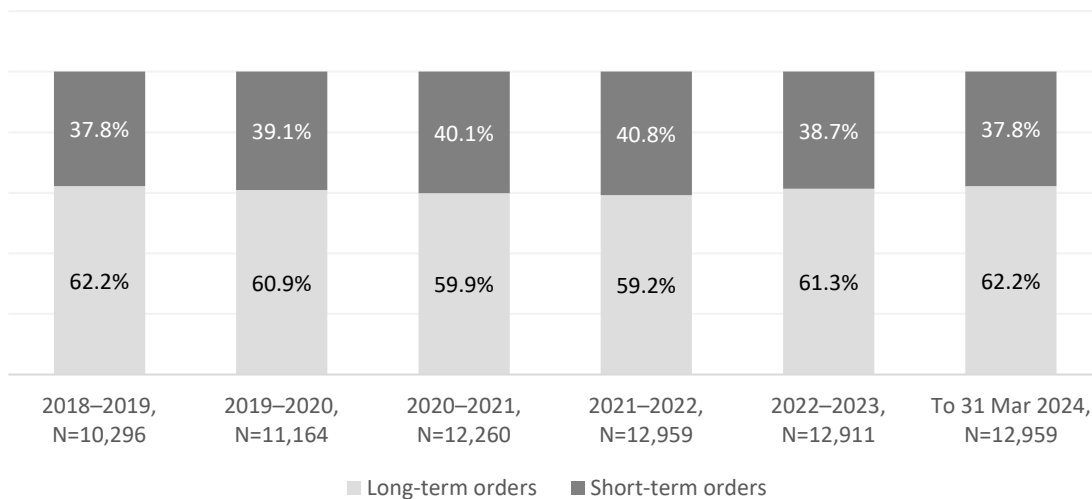
Figure 19: Number of offences against the person (violent crime) and number of offences against property recorded in Queensland where the offender was a person aged 10–17 years



Source: QPS (2024). Reported offenders number – QLD. <https://www.police.qld.gov.au/maps-and-statistics>

Care planning for children in state care either not occurring or not being recorded. In 2024, the QFCC analysed the number of children in OOHC under short-term and long-term orders as well as the percentage who had case plans. While short-term orders have been increasing slightly as a percentage of all orders, according to data from the most recent reporting period, they now have returned to 2018–2019 levels.²¹⁶

Figure 20: Percentage of children subject to short-term versus long-term orders



Source: DCSSDS (2024). Our performance website²¹⁷

As at 31 March 2024, the percentage of children with a case plan was 93.7 per cent which was around the same as at 30 June 2019 (94.0%), however, the percentage of those with a current

case plan has steadily dropped from 86.5 per cent of children to 78.2 per cent over the same time period.²¹⁸

The system not meeting the needs of children and young people, following concerns raised by frontline child safety workers. The majority of respondents to the *QFCC's Workforce Survey* disagreed that the child protection and family support system met the needs of children, young people and families. This trend has continued in our most recent survey in 2024, with 73 per cent disagreeing (47% disagree and 26% strongly disagree), compared with 10 per cent agreeing (9% agree and 1% strongly agree).

Fair treatment of parents by Child Safety, following survey results revealing less than half feel recognised. The *Charter of Rights for parents* was introduced in June 2022, developed with input from parents and kin. A 2024 survey conducted by the QFCC in collaboration with the Family Inclusion Network found that only 34 per cent of parents of children in OOHC were aware of the Charter. Results also showed that only 45 per cent felt recognised and respected by the child protection system, and only 47 per cent felt treated fairly. This survey, the first of its kind in Queensland, serves as a baseline for future enhancements.²¹⁹ Child Safety is currently working to undertake a regular parent survey in 2024–2025 to understand how well the *Charter of Rights for parents* is being implemented, and findings from this survey will become a useful monitoring tool for the QFCC in relation to the experiences of parents in the Child Safety system.

The growing number of offences committed by young people living in OOHC and residential care. As at 31 March 2024, 191 Queensland children aged 10 to seventeen were under youth justice supervision and subject to a child protection order.²²⁰ Of these, 149 (74.0%) were First Nations young people. The rate of children on youth justice orders was higher for those living in residential care, with an overall rate of 5.1 per cent for Queensland but with significant regional variation ranging from 2.5 per cent in the South East region to 13.8 per cent in North Queensland.²²¹ Among young people within the youth justice system, rates of prior or current youth justice contact are high, with about one in five (20.7%) young people subject to both a youth justice supervision and a child protection order²²² and 58.2 per cent who had an interaction with the child protection system in the previous five years. During 2020–2021 Australia-wide, among young people in detention, 17.4 per cent have had a residential care placement, 16.1 per cent have had any foster or relative/kinship placement and 3.6 per cent have only had a foster or relative/kinship care placement.²²³ Rates of prior child protection contact are higher still among young people among the Collaborative Response Cohort, previously known as SROs. As at 31 March 2024, 134 SROs had an active child protection order, a rate of 2.3 per 10,000.²²⁴

The increased use of detention including unsentenced detention. Over the past five years, there has been an increase in the number and rate of children and young people subject to youth justice custody, and a decrease in community-based supervision (Table 18). Between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024, the rate of young people subject to community-based supervision fell from 30.3 to 20.9 per 10,000 young people aged 10 to 17 while the number in youth justice custody on an average day increased from 4.2 to 5.4 per 10,000 young people aged 10 to 17 (Table 18).²²⁵

Between 31 March 2020 and 31 March 2024, the proportion of young people in detention who were in unsentenced detention increased from 83.3 per cent to 86.2 per cent although this rate had fallen from the prior year.

Table 18: Number (and rate per 10,000) of children and young people within the Queensland youth justice system on an average day

	12 months ending 31 March					Change since 2020	Change since 2023
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024		
Community-based supervision	1579.5 (30.3)	1321.1 (24.7)	1279.9 (23.5)	1203.8 (21.5)	1195.9 (20.9)	24.3% decrease	0.7% decrease
Youth justice custody	218.0 (4.2)	217.9 (4.1)	280.0 (5.1)	300.3 (5.4)	311.0 (5.4)	42.7% increase	3.6% increase
Youth detention centre	200.9 (3.9)	214.6 (4.0)	273.3 (5.0)	281.3 (5.0)	285.9 (5.0)	42.3% increase	1.6% increase
Youth detention on unsentenced detention	167.3 (3.2)	188.4 (3.5)	235.3 (4.3)	248.8 (4.4)	246.5 (4.3)	47.3% increase	0.9% decrease

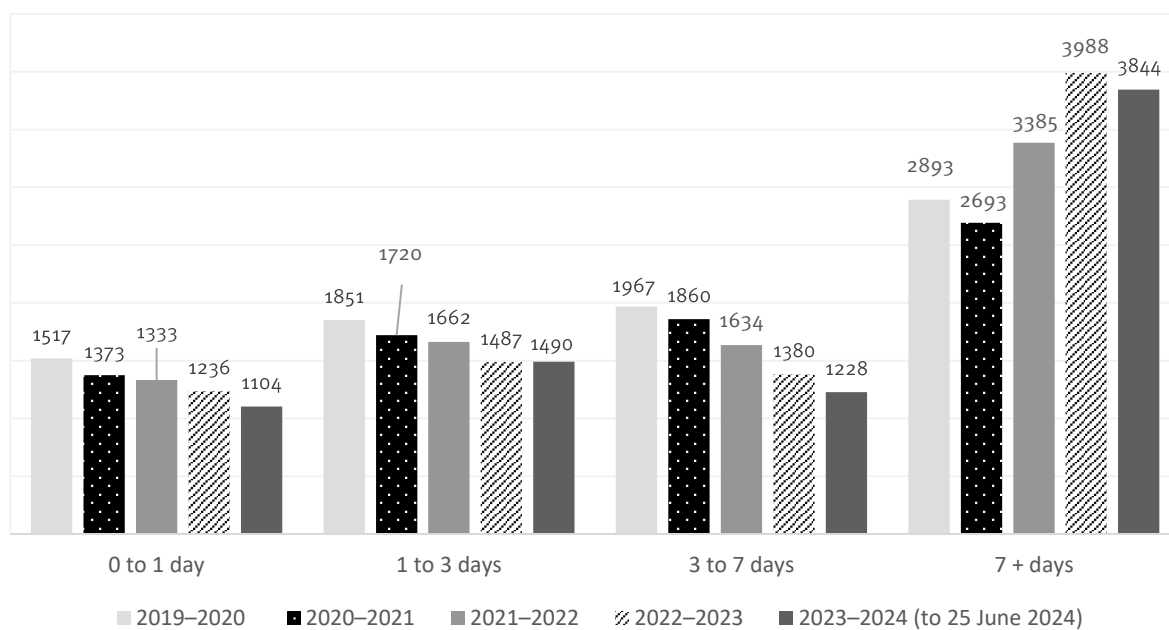
Source: DYJ, unpublished data request, 2024.

Continuing reliance on the use of watch houses to detain children is causing harm. Monitoring undertaken by the QFCC in 2023, prompted by concerns from bodies like the OPG, revealed prolonged detention of young people, especially First Nations young people in watch houses. On 24 August 2023, the Queensland Parliament passed urgent amendments to the *Youth Justice Act 1992* concerning the holding of children in police watch houses. Amendments allow lawful holding until beds are available in youth detention centres, increased transparency in prioritisation and transfer decisions, and provided a human rights declaration override.²²⁶ In November 2023, we released a report highlighting increased detention durations, with significant rises in stays lasting eight to 14 days and 15 days or more.²²⁷

Within the report, we reviewed the cases of 30 young people who were identified by the OPG as having spent extended time in a watch house in 2022 and 2023 (including 17 young people who had spent 10–28 days and five young people who had spent 29+ days). The review found that tougher bail conditions, slower Childrens Court clearance rates and overcrowded youth detention centres were driving extended watch house stays. The most recent data on watch house admissions (Figure 21) indicates that over the past five years, the overall number of admissions dropped 6.8 per cent from 8228 to 7666^{III} and that the number of admissions has dropped for every duration except for “7+ days” where there has been a 32.9 per cent increase. In 2023–2024, one in two admissions to a Queensland watch house led to the young person being detained for seven days or more.

^{III} The data for FY24 is only to 25 June 2024.

Figure 21: Number of admissions of young people aged 10–17 years and length of stay in custody in police watch houses



Source: QPS, unpublished data request, 2024.

The QFCC has been advised of a number of reforms led by the DYJ to improve conditions of young people awaiting transfer to youth detention centres. These include \$149.2 million for the delivery of Wacol Youth Remand Centre in late 2024, to reduce the number of young people in watch houses and to support stronger access to education and therapeutic services; the operation of the Caboolture Watchhouse Education Support Hub from December 2023, providing targeted and wraparound support (including health and education support) for young people on remand; and the extension of watch house support staff and the contract with Murri Watch to provide support to young people in regional watch houses. The Fast Track Sentencing Pilot has improved court clearance rates with an additional 170 files finalised each month, and the median number of days dropping from 53 to 46 days in pilot sites.

Data capturing on the use of separations in youth detention centres. Separations are a restrictive practice to ensure safety and welfare and are strictly monitored according to the *Youth Justice Regulation 2016* and *Human Rights Act 2019*. The most recently reported data²²⁸ is provided for the 2021–2022 financial year where there were:²²⁹

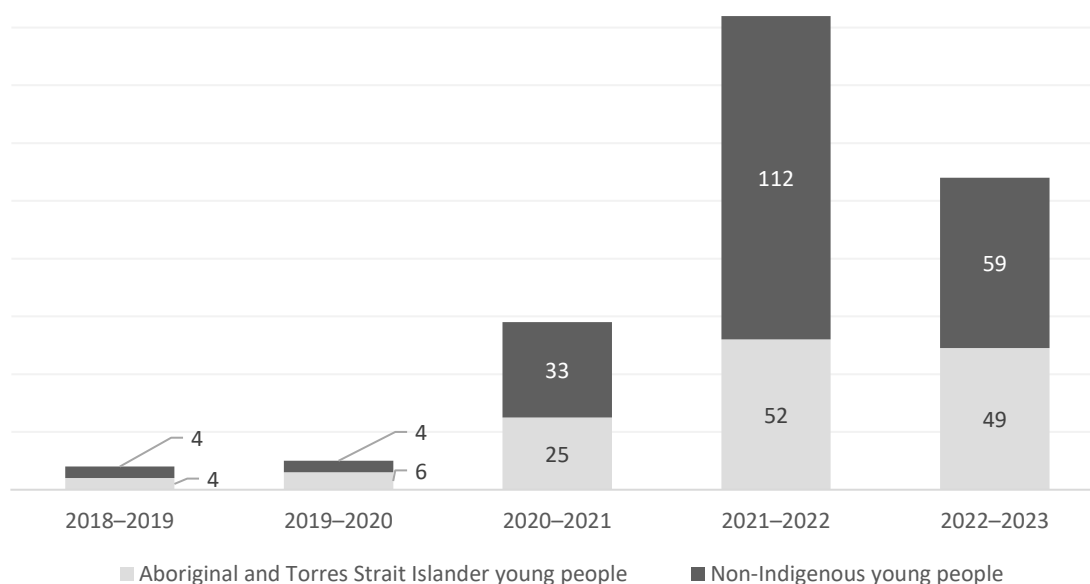
- 30,255 separations between six and 12 hours;
- 519 separations between 12 and 24 hours
- 83 lasting over 24 hours.

As part of the department’s youth detention infrastructure expansion project, a replacement system is being scoped to ensure comprehensive, real time reporting capability for separation

and other restrictive practices within youth detention centres. The QFCC will monitor this data once it becomes available.

The significant rise in self-harm and suicide attempts among young people in custody in Queensland. In 2021–2022, there were 164 incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide. In 2022–2023, there were 108 incidents, with 49 involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and 59 involving non-Indigenous youth.²³⁰

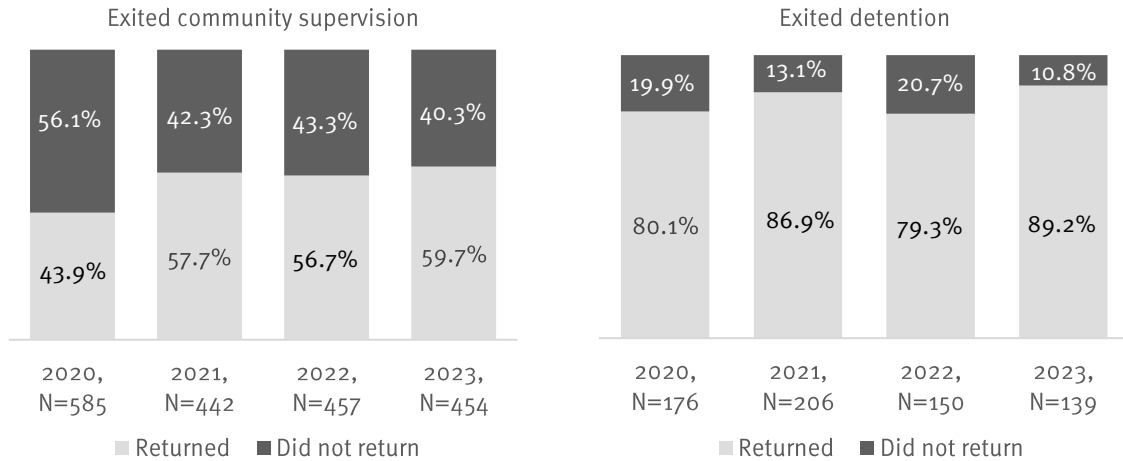
Figure 22: Number of incidents of self-harm and attempted suicide in custody not requiring hospitalisation in Queensland, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status



Source: Productivity Commission (2024). Report on Government Services. Table 17A.19²³¹

Queensland’s model of youth justice is not effectively rehabilitating offenders. Of the 454 young people exiting community supervision in the 12 months ending 31 March 2023, 59.7 per cent returned to the youth justice system within 12 months. Of the 139 young people exiting youth detention in the 12 months ending 31 March 2023, 89.2 per cent returned to the youth justice system within 12 months. These return rates have been steadily increasing since 2020 (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Rate of return of young people aged 10–16 years to the youth justice system (community supervision or youth detention) within 12 months

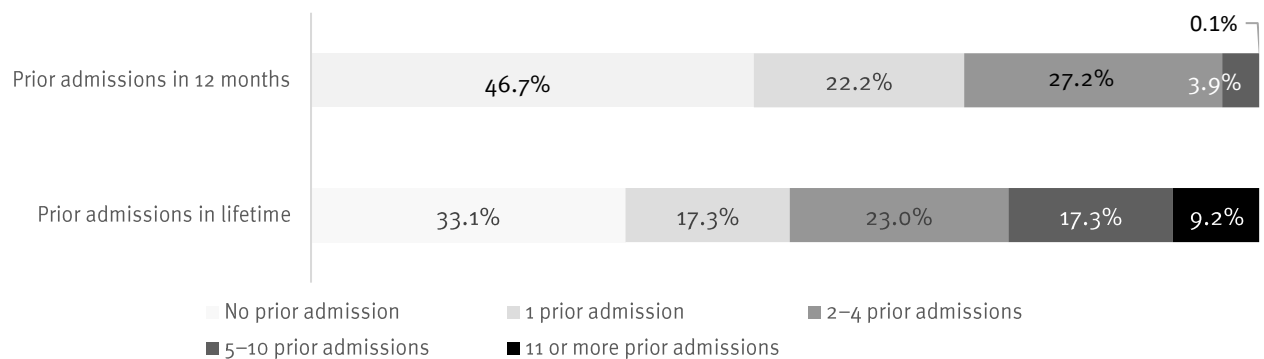


Source: DYJ, unpublished data request, 2024.

The following two figures examine the extent to which young people aged 10–17 years who have been either under community supervision or in youth detention (Figure 24) have had repeated contact with the system by examining number of prior entries (past 12 months and lifetime).

Figure 24 presents the number of times the 1615 young people who were under community supervision (for 12 months ending 31 March 2024) had prior entries to community supervision. In the past 12 months, almost half had no prior entries however 4.0 per cent had five or more admissions. In terms of lifetime prior entries, only one third had no prior entries and 26.5 per cent had five or more prior admissions.

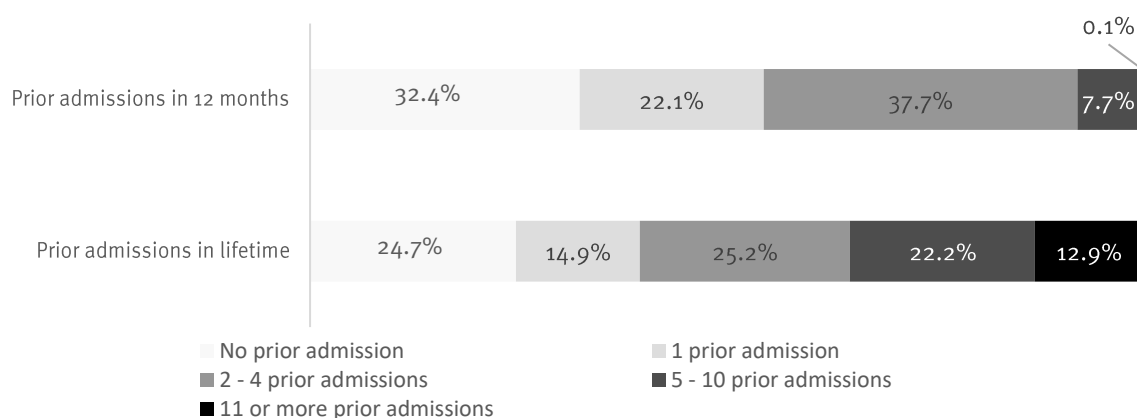
Figure 24: Proportion of young people aged 10–17 years under community supervision (N=1615) disaggregated by total number of prior entries (past 12 months and lifetime) (12 months ending 31 Mar 2024)



Source: DYJ, unpublished data request, 2024.

Figure 25 presents the number of times the 990 young people who were in youth detention (for 12-months ending 31 March 2024) had prior entries to youth detention. In the past 12-months, almost one third had no prior entries however 7.8 per cent had five or more admissions. In terms of lifetime prior entries, less than one quarter had no prior entries and 35.1 per cent had five or more prior admissions.

Figure 25: Proportion of young people aged 10–17 years in youth detention (N=990) disaggregated by total number of prior entries (past 12 months and lifetime) (12 months ending 31 Mar 2024)



Source: DYJ, unpublished data request, 2024.

Findings from our previous work have raised concerns about the effectiveness of detention, supports and services in rehabilitating and reintegrating young people following detention.^{232, 233, 234} In April 2023, we commenced a review into young people’s experiences of exiting detention. The report was informed by the experiences of 66 young people who had been in detention in Queensland, families of young people who had offended, and 44 frontline workers from across Queensland. Young people spoke about the causes that drove them to offend—poverty, housing instability, family breakdown and exposure to DFV, and drug and alcohol use and dependence—and how the support they received both in detention and on release was ineffective at addressing these factors. Transition plans were described as being ineffective in helping young people reintegrate into their communities, with young people saying they did not receive enough support to build strong and lasting relationships with people who could aid their rehabilitation. Others said their transition plans were not tailored to their needs, locations and circumstances; took too long for actions to be implemented; and did not offer intensive support to address their needs. Young people said they feel their communities view them negatively, making them feel disconnected, unvalued and unwanted, which they said discouraged them to participate positively within their communities.

Young people clearly articulated that their rehabilitative prospects were better when they could build a strong, trusting and enduring relationship with a support worker or a member of their family or community, and that this was more effective than participation in a short-term, generic or universal program. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds reported that for them, culture was a central element of creating strength, support and direction. The report made two

recommendations to strengthen post-detention transition programs for a dedicated 12-month period, with programs forming part of a broader developmental approach to crime prevention that invests in supports and services to address the root causes of offending.

Consistent with the conclusions made in our *Exiting youth detention* report, the QAO found that the 72-hour transition plans from youth detention, which are the primary approach to supporting young people through their exits, were not based on evidence and that Youth Justice could not explain the rationale for only planning for the first 72-hours after a young offender's release.²³⁵ The newly released *A Safer Queensland: Youth Justice Strategy*²³⁶ notes these will be 'improved' however a more concrete action plan, with strategies and achievable targets will be required in order to effect improvements. Transition plans need to be longer than 72-hours and provide wrap around supports for the young person and their families. The QAO also identified that data on access to education services and rehabilitation programs are not clearly captured for SROs. Of the SRO files that were sampled for the purposes of their audit, 18 per cent (nine out of 50) had no record of any rehabilitation programs being delivered to the young person to prevent their reoffending. Effectively addressing the drivers of offending behaviour requires evidence-based strategies and programs tailored to the needs of the young offender.

Goal 4: Queensland’s OOHC and youth justice systems are meeting the needs and upholding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities

First Nations children, young people and families continue to be disproportionately represented in statutory child protection and youth justice systems in Queensland and across Australia. We are committed to identifying and highlighting the dynamics and drivers of this and helping others understand and address the causes.

How does Queensland compare?

Over the past three years, the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are over-represented in OOHC has worsened in Queensland and every Australian state, with the exception of the Territories. The disproportionality ratio^{IV} for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland was 5.74 in 2022–2023. This means there were 5.74 times more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC than would be expected given the proportion of First Nations children and young people in the state’s population. Table 19 shows that Queensland’s disproportionality ratio was higher than Tasmania (3.92) and the Northern Territory (2.16) but lower than all other states and the Australian Capital Territory.^V

Table 19: Disproportionality ratios for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged 0–17 years in OOHC across Australian jurisdictions

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
2018–2019	6.32	15.03	5.36	8.14	7.31	3.33	9.35	2.15
2019–2020	6.52	15.75	5.39	8.45	7.57	3.40	9.98	2.13
2020–2021	6.71	16.04	5.50	8.60	7.62	3.59	9.38	2.19
2021–2022	6.79	16.01	5.66	8.73	7.81	3.64	9.99	2.19
2022–2023	6.79	16.25	5.74	9.11	7.82	3.92	8.62	2.16

Source: Productivity Commission, 2023 Table 16A.9

^{IV} Disproportionality refers to when representation of a particular group is higher than it should be by statistical standards. If the cohort’s representation is proportionate to their representation in the target population, the disproportionality ratio will equal 1.0.

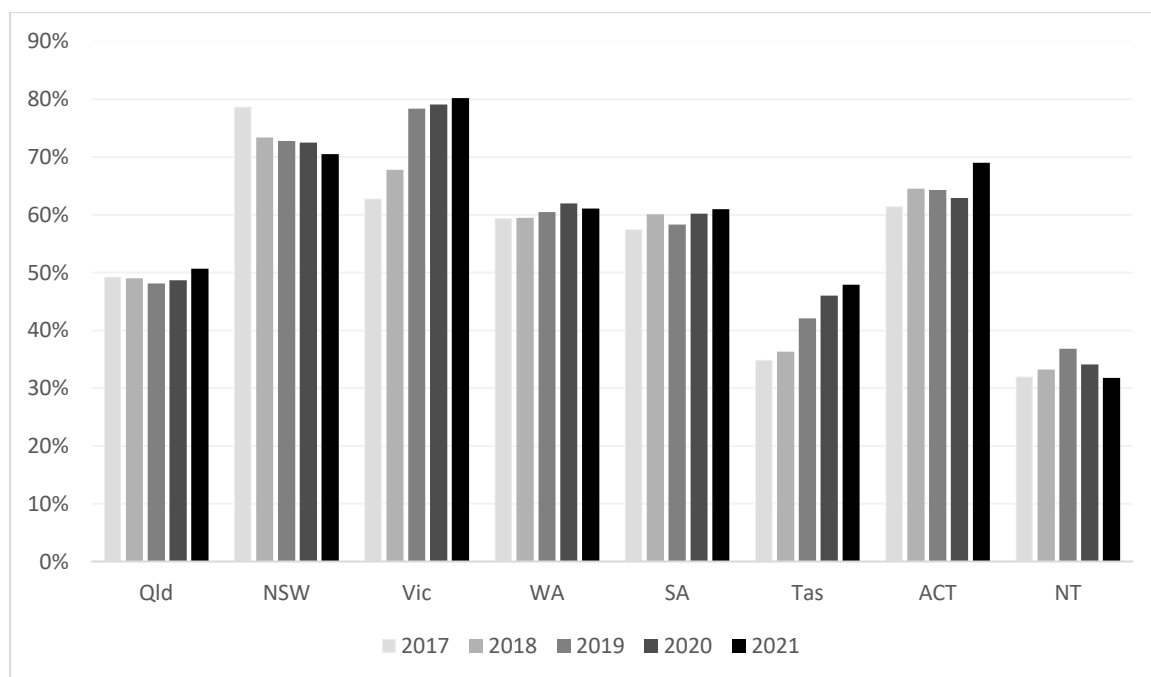
^V From 2018–2019 the scope of OOHC changed. This means that in some jurisdictions, disproportionality ratios for out-of-home care from 2018–2019 are not comparable with data for previous years.

The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people within the child protection system is affected by their interactions with other systems and services.

Australia’s National Agreement on Closing the Gap outlines targets to reduce inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with a target date of 2031. Reducing disproportionate representation in child protection is one of the agreement’s 17 socio-economic outcome areas. Other targets relate to early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, housing, safe communities, and disproportionate representation in youth justice. Disproportionate representation in statutory systems does not occur in isolation.

Queensland has one of the lowest percentages of children living in OOHC who were placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers. Compared with children and young people living in other jurisdictions, a lower percentage of Queensland First Nations children living in OOHC are placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers. The proportion has been relatively consistent for the past five years and in 2021, was 50.7 per cent which was lower than the percentage for all other jurisdictions except for Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Figure 26: Percentage of First Nations children placed with First Nations or non-Indigenous relatives or kin or other First Nations caregivers



Source: AIHW (2022). The ATISCPP indicators²³⁷

What is working well or improving?

Kin placement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC is increasing. It is now more likely that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child will be placed with kin or with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. Dedicated kinship teams and greater engagement with ATSICCOs have resulted in more First Nations children in OOHC

being placed with First Nations kin: 27.9 per cent in 2022–2023, up from 23.9 per cent in 2019–2020.²³⁸ In September 2023, the Queensland Government announced as part of its Breaking Cycles Action plan²³⁹ that, in partnership with QATSICPP, they would be trialling a program, *Family Caring for Family* to increase the number of First Nations children placed with family and/or kin.²⁴⁰

Delegated Authority in selected Queensland locations helping to restore and recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination and having positive benefits for children and families. The Queensland Government started trialling Delegated Authority arrangements late in 2020, in three communities in the Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland region.²⁴¹ QATSICPP and Child Safety have partnered to develop a 10-year blueprint for implementing Delegated Authority in Queensland: *Reclaiming our Storyline*.²⁴² The rollout was extended in 2023–2024, with 14.5 per cent of Outsourced Service Delivery investment being made with ATSI CCOs (an increase of 2.3 percentage points since 2022–2023). This included 1.8 per cent in investment for Delegated Authority with nine organisations. As of 30 June 2024, the Director-General has approved delegations for a total of 197 children since delegated authority arrangements commenced. Delegations include functions and powers related to reunification (placement with parent), case planning, and family contact and cultural connection.²⁴³ As highlighted by the QFCC’s 2022–2023 Principle Focus regional snapshots, Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland is the only Queensland Child Safety region tracking towards meeting the Closing the Gap target 12 to reduce the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC by 45 per cent.

Stakeholders continue to credit the strong relationships between ATSI CCOs and Child Safety and the impact of greater self-determination through Delegated Authority and other place-based approaches. In 2022–2023, the region’s Finding Kin Team increased the number of First Nations children in OOHC being placed with First Nations kin by 3.8 per cent and reunified 41 children with their families. There was also a positive trend away from placements in residential care (13 fewer children in residential care in 2022–2023). The role of Delegated Authority in achieving strong reunification is undisputable – 90 per cent of reunified children were within a Delegated Authority catchment.²⁴⁴ Stakeholders from the QFCC Government Reference Panel appreciated the collaborative nature and strong outcomes of Delegated Authority processes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s readiness for school is improving. According to the Australian Early Development Census, between 2009 and 2021 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland who were developmentally on track to start school had risen from 21.5 per cent to 33.8 per cent. In 2021, this compared with 53.2 per cent of non-Indigenous children in Queensland. This gap has remained consistent across the past five Australian Early Development Census censuses.²⁴⁵

Supporting Queensland’s First Nations languages through Government investment. In 2023, 151 Queensland state schools and six Outdoor Environmental Education Centres were investigating, developing or implementing a First Nations language program in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Forty-four of these schools are at the ‘fully implementing’ stage and are engaged with teaching and learning in 26 different First

Nations languages. Language programs are being developed for a further 29 different First Nations languages, making a potential total of 55 distinct First Nations languages being taught in coming years.^{246,VI}

Closing the Gap outcome 16 is that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing*. At the baseline time period (2018–2019), 26 languages were spoken with five considered strong. No additional data is currently available to track progress towards this goal.²⁴⁷

A small but growing number of First Nations children are subject to PCOs or orders granting long-term guardianship to a suitable family member or another suitable person. In May 2023, amendments to the *Child Protection Act 1999* broadened the definition of kin to include members of family groups who were people of significance as well as people regarded under either Aboriginal tradition or under Island custom as kin of the child. Long-term guardianship orders to suitable family members or other suitable persons are seen as a positive trend when options for reunification are exhausted.²⁴⁸ Our prior review found that all PCOs were made to kin that in most cases provided continuation of relational and placement stability for the child.²⁴⁹

Table 20: Number of First Nations children subject to different types of orders

	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023
First Nations children on PCOs	8	28	29
First Nations children on order granting long-term guardianship to a suitable family member	39	41	64
First Nations children on order granting long-term guardianship to another suitable person	17	18	24

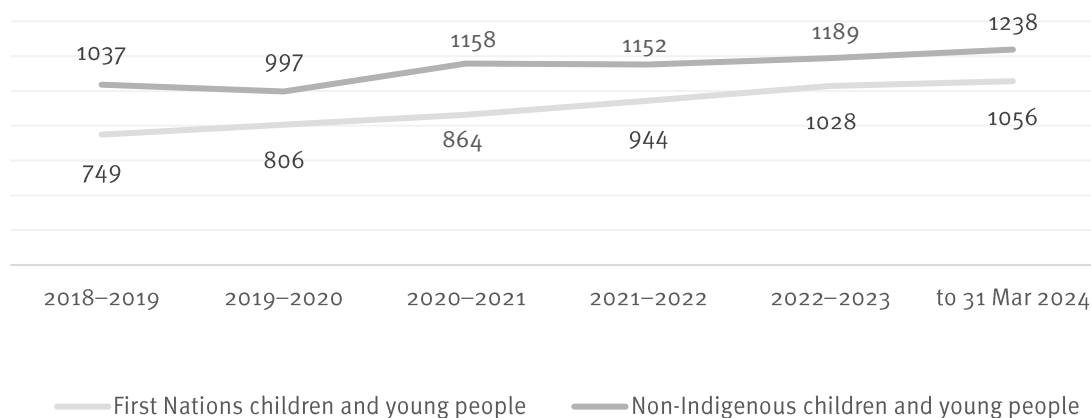
Source: Director of Child Protection Litigation Annual Report, 2022–2023.

Although numbers remain small, there has been a gradual increase in the use of PCOs and orders granting long-term guardianship to a suitable family member or another suitable person for First Nations children.²⁵⁰ As at 31 March 2024, 77 First Nations children in OOHC were subject to a PCO in Queensland.²⁵¹ The increase in these types of matters is reflective of the reforms focussed on promoting positive long-term outcomes for children in the child protection system that commenced on 29 October 2018 as a result of the *Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017*.²⁵² We will be monitoring the impact of legislative changes on orders in the coming months.

The growing number of First Nations children exiting care. While the number of First Nations children entering care continues to exceed the number exiting care, the number of First Nations children exiting care grew by 37.2 per cent between 2018–2019 and 2022–2023. This compares with a 14.7 per cent increase for non-Indigenous children over the same time period.

^{VI} This data was self-reported by schools as part of the Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Programs in Queensland State Schools 2022 collection survey, implemented in Semester 1, 2022. All Queensland state schools and Outdoor Environmental Education Centres were invited to respond to the survey. 1133 schools (88.4%) and 14 Outdoor Environmental Education Centres (56%) responded to the survey.

Figure 27: Number of children and young people exiting OOHC by First Nations status



Source: DCSSDS, 2024²⁵³

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are reunified with their families, it is almost always successful. While the number of reunifications is low, it has been gradually increasing over time.

Table 21: Number of reunifications of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022	2022–2023	1 year increase	5 year increase
Number of reunifications	203	173	194	214	239	11.7%	17.7%

In 2022–2023, 239 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were reunified with their families and 215 (90.0%) did not return to care within 12 months.²⁵⁴ Through our Principle Focus work we spoke with regional Child Safety staff and ATSI CCOs across two communities in the Sunshine Coast and Central Queensland regions who are seeing significant improvements in the number of children and young people safely reunified with their families. This region accounts for 20 per cent (48 children) of all children and young people reunified with their families in Queensland.

What needs further improvement?

Residential care placements continue to increase across the state for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. As at 31 December 2022, there were 715 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in residential care. By 31 December 2023, this had risen to 794 children, an 11.0 per cent increase, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children now comprise 43.4 per cent of all children in residential care. Among all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC, more than one in eight live in residential care.²⁵⁵

Child protection and youth justice Closing the Gap targets are not improving. Target 11 of Closing the Gap is to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10–

17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031. In 2021–2022 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait young people (10–17 years) in detention was 40.9 per 10,000 from a baseline of 41.2 per 10,000 in 2018–2019.²⁵⁶ The trend for the target shows no change from the baseline and is not on track.²⁵⁷

Target 12 of Closing the Gap is to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0–17 years old) in OOHC by 45 per cent by 2031. In 2022 the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children in OOHC was 45.0 per 1000 from a baseline of 37.0 per 1000 in 2019.²⁵⁸ Nationally, based on progress from the baseline, the target is worsening.²⁵⁹

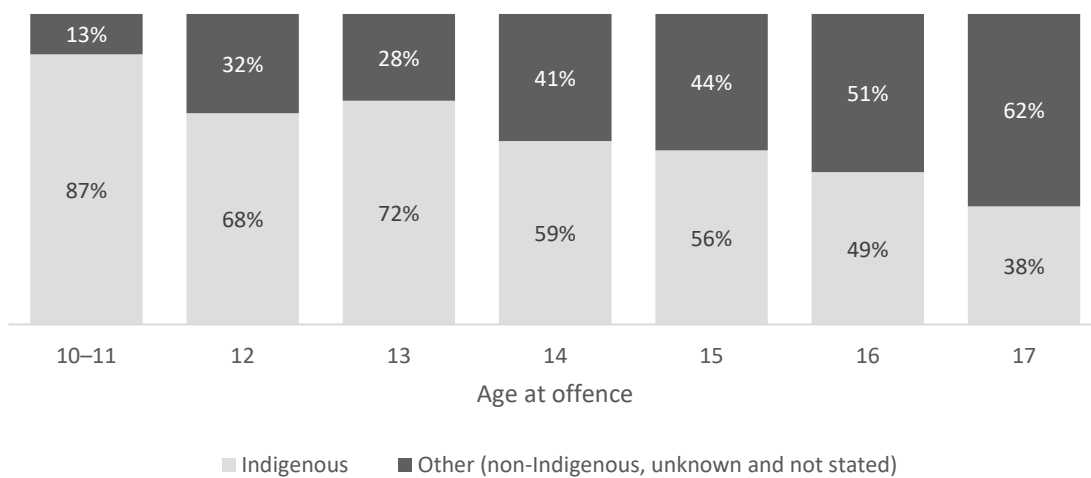
The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care continues to exceed the number exiting. Between 2018–19 and the year ending 31 March 2024, the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering OOHC increased by 13.2 per cent from 1213 to 1373,²⁶⁰ whereas the number exiting OOHC increased by 41.0 per cent from 749 to 1056.²⁶¹ For every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child or young person who exited OOHC in the year ending 31 March 2024, 1.3 entered.²⁶²

There is a lack of culturally strong responses and service systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who experience DFV. The *Healing our children and young people framework* recognises that the deep wounds that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience because of DFV require a significant healing response. Many DFV responses with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities use a crisis response model. While this response ensures victim survivors in crisis get consistent, clearly communicated responses, it also applies pressure for the separation of families and pressure on women as victims to take on the sole responsibility for their child’s safety and wellbeing. The *You Can’t Pour from an Empty Cup* Report found that experiencing DFV negatively impacted childhoods, behaviours and the ability to form healthy relationships as adults, and that interaction with the child protection system exacerbated distress. The report called for increased cultural and healing practices and expertise in responding to trauma.²⁶³ DFV services in Queensland are therefore primarily involved in removing perpetrators from victims with little to no consideration that a child’s cultural identity exists within their family and community. In addition, this approach does not provide opportunities to change or understand their impact on their children.²⁶⁴

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be less likely to be diverted from the youth justice system and disproportionate representation is highest for younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander defendants. Where appropriate, children and young people in conflict with the law should be dealt with in a way that does not involve judicial intervention. Police can deal with offenders using court action (laying charges that must be answered in court) or non-court action (such as cautions, conferencing or issuing fines). The rate of proceedings by police using court action against young people dropped between 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 for both First Nations and non-Indigenous young people, and the court action rate is still significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (71.9% of proceedings in 2021–2022 compared with 46.3% for non-Indigenous young people).²⁶⁵ In 2022–2023, 87.0 per cent of 10 and 11-year-old defendants, 68.0 per cent of 12-year-old defendants and 72.0 per cent of 13-year-old defendants were Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander children (see Figure 28).²⁶⁶ In 2022–2023, in comparison with non-Indigenous children, 10 to 13-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more than 45 times more likely to be under community-based supervision more than 51 times more likely to be in detention.²⁶⁷

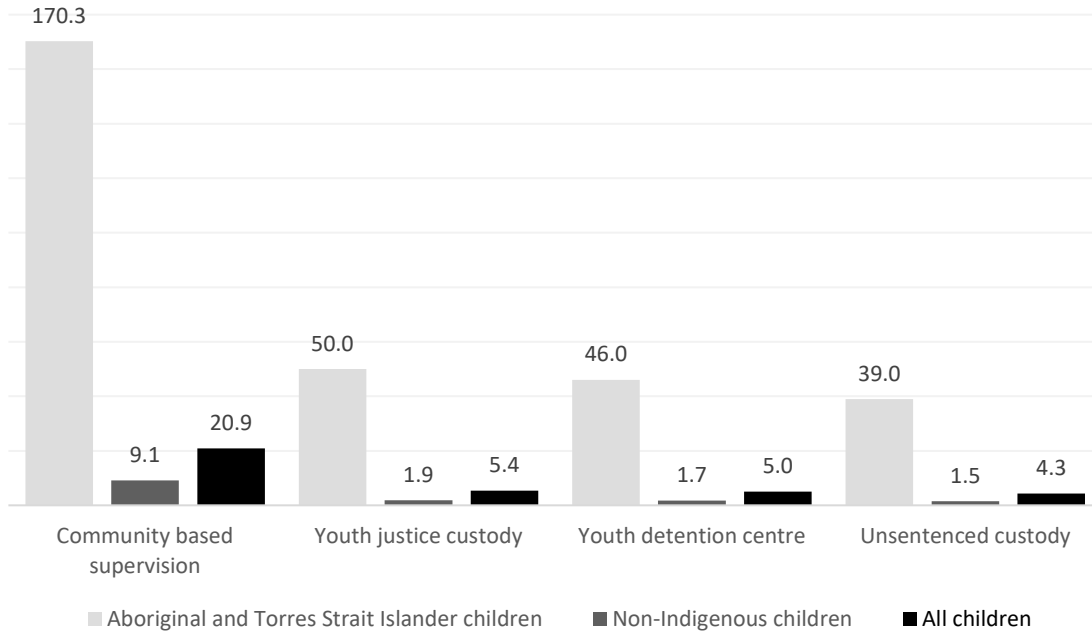
Figure 28: A comparison of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of distinct child defendants, by age at offence (2022–2023)



Source: Childrens Court of Queensland, 2023 ²⁶⁸

The disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the Queensland youth justice system is ongoing. Despite comprising only 8.2 per cent of all children and young people aged 10–17 years in Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accounted for 53 per cent of all child defendants who were convicted in a Queensland court in 2022–2023. Additionally, between 2019–2020 and 2022–2023, over-representation in the conviction rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, as compared to other young people increased. In 2019–2020 they were 10.9 times more likely to be convicted but by 2022–2023 this had increased to 13.0 times more likely.²⁶⁹ Figure 29 shows the extent of the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the Queensland youth justice system.

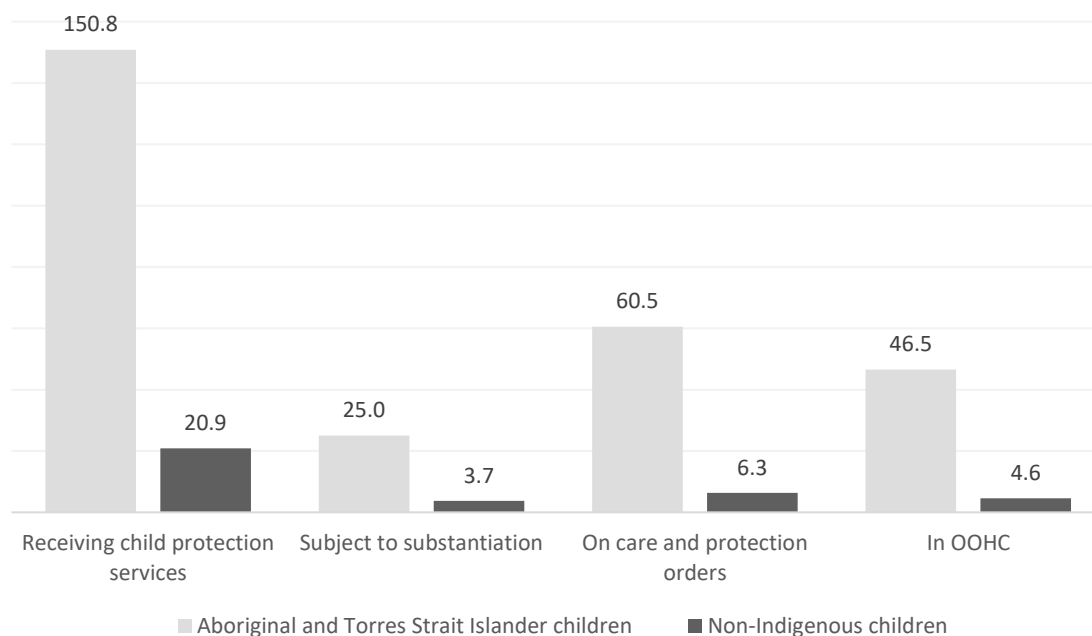
Figure 29: Rates per 10,000 young people involved with the Queensland youth justice system on an average day, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (For 12 months ending 31 March 2024)



Source: DYJ, 2024²⁷⁰

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be overrepresented throughout the Queensland child protection system. Figure 30 demonstrates the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people at various stages of the child protection system. In 2022–2023, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children nationwide were 7.2 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be receiving child protection services, 6.8 times more likely to be subject to substantiation, 9.6 times more likely to be on a care and protection order and 10.1 times more likely to be in OOHC. ²⁷¹

Figure 30: Rates per 1000 children and young people at various stages of the Queensland child protection statutory system, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (2022–2023)

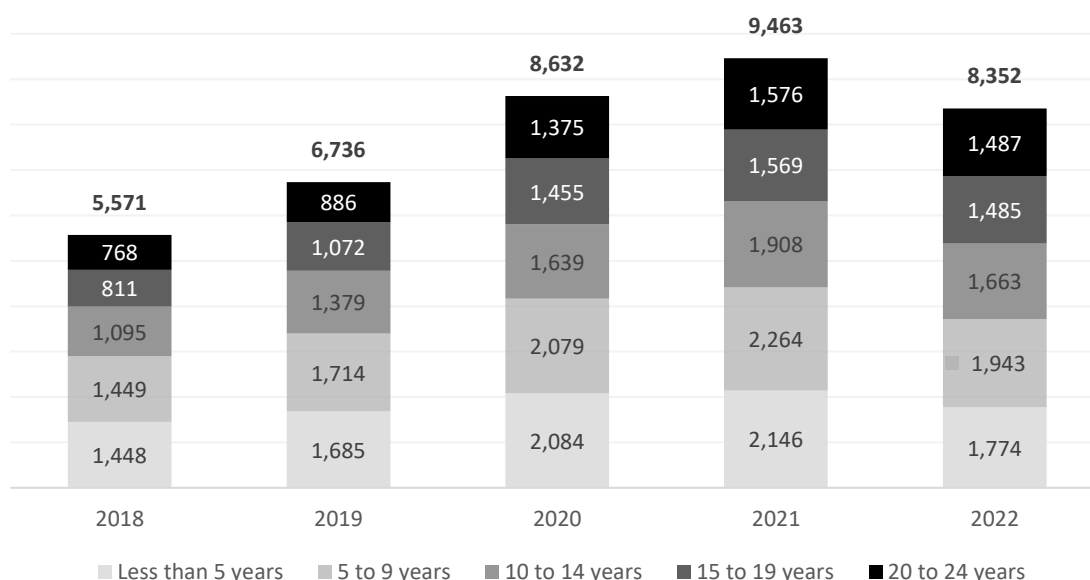


Source: AIHW (2024).²⁷²

Insights from our Principle Focus work suggest that while there are still opportunities to drive down disproportionate representation within the secondary and tertiary child protection system, the greatest drivers to eliminate disproportionate representation are the universal, secondary and tertiary supports across the Our Way wellbeing domains (health, home and environment, learning and skills, safety, culture and connections, mental health and emotional wellbeing, empowerment and economic wellbeing). Governments (state and federal) must urgently address the deficits outlined in the Closing the Gap reforms. Without the fundamental shift across all areas, over-representation is unlikely to be eliminated.²⁷³

The high number of First Nations children on Queensland’s public housing register. There is substantial overlap between involvement with child protection and need for public housing. Children living in public housing are more likely to face a life trajectory characterised by greater contact with the health system, greater early life developmental vulnerability and greater contact with the criminal justice system.²⁷⁴ Studies of families on public housing waitlists indicate the experience leaves them feeling powerless, extremely stressed and unable to plan ahead.²⁷⁵ Between 2018 and 2022, the number of First Nations children aged up to 24 years on the Queensland housing register increased from 5571 to 8352.²⁷⁶ This means they have been approved for public housing but not yet received an offer of housing. Despite substantial commitments from both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to enhance social and affordable housing supply²⁷⁷ there is more work to be done.

Figure 31: The number of First Nations children on the Queensland housing register



Source: Growing Up in Queensland (2024)

The increased gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous infant mortality rates. The annual rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infant deaths has been decreasing, on average, by 0.9 per cent per year since 2009 compared with an annual 2.4 per cent reduction for non-Indigenous infants. While decreases in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate mirrored decreases in the non-Indigenous mortality rate over much of the period, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rate increased in the last three years whereas the non-Indigenous rate plateaued. The infant mortality rate in 2022–2023 in Queensland remains significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants than non-Indigenous infants (6.6 compared with 3.6 per 1000 births).²⁷⁸

The requirement for kinship carers to hold a Blue Card is a significant barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being raised safely with family and retaining their connection to Country and culture. Planned legislative change is welcomed by the QFCC. The QFCC is pleased by the recent amendments introduced to strengthen the operation of Blue Card laws and remove the requirement for kinship carers to hold a Blue Card when caring for kin.²⁷⁹ The QFCC’s review of the Queensland Blue Card system found the Blue Card scheme’s focus on employment suitability, rather than suitability to care for kin, gave limited consideration to the child’s best interests and presented a significant barrier for prospective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers. A key finding was that removing the Working with Children screening process for kinship carers would not put the safety of children at risk but would rather increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being placed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family allowing them to be raised safely with family and retain their connection to Country and culture.²⁸⁰ Various stakeholders from the QFCC Government Reference Group have observed first-hand the impediment the Blue Card system presents for identifying and engaging kinship carers.

Goal 5: The Queensland child protection and family support system is a collaborative and accountable system

Successful implementation of reforms and overall system improvement requires broad cooperation, and shared responsibility and governance. This is noted in *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* which states “state and territory governments manage child protection systems, but we are all responsible for keeping children safe. This includes all levels of government, non-government organisations, service providers, researchers and Australian families and communities”. *Safe and Supported* also stresses the importance of building and maintaining an accountable, transparent and cost-effective system.²⁸¹

How does Queensland compare?

Queensland has a strong child and family support sector with many organisations operating to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of Queensland children and their families. Queensland has a long history of leadership in this space including the work of Bruce and Denise Morcombe who have built the nation-leading ‘Australia’s Biggest Child Safety Lesson’ and ‘Brighter Futures’ program through their remarkable Daniel Morcombe Foundation Inc. It is also the home state of Hetty Johnston AM GAICD who has established Bravehearts and is a strong advocate through the National Office for Child Safety. Queensland hosts Jon Rouse APM and his international leading work to uncover online child exploitation at the Brisbane-based Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation as well as the work of Bob Atkinson who was a Commissioner of the Royal Commission and who remains a tireless advocate for the rights of victim-survivors. The *Putting Queensland Kids First* strategy, launched in June 2024, prioritises resources and expenditure on services and supports for children and their families.²⁸² The QFCC is pleased to see the strategy centres children and seeks to strengthen prevention and early access to services.

There is increasing transparency about the performance of Queensland’s youth justice and child protection systems. The DYJ has taken steps to enhance transparency by publishing internal evaluations of its programs online.²⁸³ So far 12 evaluation reports for nine programs have been published. These include evaluations of the transition to success program, restorative justice conferencing, On Country and the electronic monitoring trial. A further four evaluations will be delivered in 2024. The department has an ongoing evaluation plan to understand what works. Guided by ongoing evaluation and new evidence, the DYJ has proposed that if programs or services prove ineffective, they will be discontinued.²⁸⁴

Like all other Australian jurisdictions, Queensland contributes to all national reporting including the Productivity Commission’s *Report on Government Services*²⁸⁵ and the AIHW’s *Child Protection Australia*.²⁸⁶ Queensland is one of a select number of jurisdictions (along with Western Australia and South Australia) reporting nationally on the number of children on guardianship/custody orders achieving national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Child Safety also reports publicly on the proportion of children in care awarded a certificate by the end of year 12 as well as post-school employment and further study destinations.²⁸⁷ Child

Safety has also recently published findings from its annual *Life in Care* survey of children and young people living in OOHC. These findings provide insight into the impact of the system on children and young people.²⁸⁸ Other administrative data regarding the Child Safety system is published with visualisations and explanations which support understanding of the system on the department's *Our Performance* website.²⁸⁹

The investment in Unify, a new case management system for child safety, should deliver increased capacity and capability for collaborative best practice. Child Safety is finalising the update of its Integrated Client Management System and will continue the progressive roll-out of Unify, its new data system in 2024–2025. Unify is client-centric and will improve information sharing and collaboration across Queensland Government agencies.²⁹⁰

What is working well or improving?

Cross-portfolio coordination efforts continuing to support the child, family and youth justice systems. Several governance groups and integrated responses tasked with leading and coordinating components of the child, family and youth justice systems continue to provide an authorising environment for collaborative responses at the frontline:

- The Queensland First Children and Families Board, consisting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders from across the state and supported by Child Safety, provides strategic guidance and oversight of the implementation of the *Our Way* strategy.²⁹¹
- The *Our Way* Interagency Strategic Partnership group, led by Child Safety, including Deputy Directors-General from relevant government agencies, fosters cross-government action to eliminate the disparity of First Nations children, young people and families in child protection.
- Child Safety's Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) team system, enables a coordinated response to the protection needs of children. Core members of the SCAN team system are Child Safety, the QPS, Queensland Health and DoE.
- 10 Domestic Violence High Risk Teams, led by DJAG, enhance responses to DFV through time-critical information sharing, safety management for victims and increased line of sight of high-risk perpetrators.²⁹²
- The recently expanded Stronger Communities initiative/ Early Action Group brings together QPS and other key government representatives to provide intensive coordination of services to young people aged 8–16 years who are at risk of entering the youth justice system, and their families. Early Action Groups have been rolled out in Townsville, Mount Isa and Cairns.
- Multiagency collaborative panels enable government and non-government agencies to provide intensive case management and holistic support for young people identified as high risk or who are requiring a collaborative response through a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach. Multiagency collaborative panels coordinate access for young people to services such as mental health, drug and alcohol programs, reconnecting with

school and school engagement support, cultural connections, and connecting with doctors and allied health providers.

- The Youth Crime Taskforce has now been permanently established and led by the QPS. The Taskforce is focussed on building intensive multiagency case management of high-risk repeat youth offenders.²⁹³
- Youth Co-responder teams include dedicated teams of police and youth justice workers providing a rapid response to target young people at risk of offending and young people on bail. Already operational in 13 regions of Queensland, between 2020–2021 and 2023–2024, Youth Co-responder teams have had nearly 96,000 engagements with young people, including checking their compliance with bail conditions and following up to ensure they are accessing the right services. In 2023–2024, three out of five engagements were with First Nations young people.²⁹⁴

The growing number of opportunities for children and young people to contribute their perspectives on issues that affect them. In the QFCC’s 2024 Community Survey, respondents were divided about whether ‘young people have the opportunity to contribute to discussions about issues that affect them’, with 45 per cent of respondents agreeing and 37 per cent disagreeing.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the amplification of the voices of children and young people is increasingly valued and sought by a number of Queensland Government and non-government agencies.

Child Safety is running the annual *My Life in Care* survey to better understand the experiences of Queensland children and young people who are currently living in OOHC.²⁹⁶ A residential care expert panel, comprising young people with lived experience of residential care was established to inform Child Safety’s review of the residential care system; one of the key actions from the *Roadmap for Residential Care* has been to establish a ministerial youth advisory group to give young people in care a greater say about their future.²⁹⁷ Other opportunities accessible to all young Queenslanders include the YMCA Queensland Youth Parliament which has been established to enable young people aged 15 to 25 years to have their voices heard about issues that matter to them and their communities.^{298, 299} The Australian Institute of Play hosted a childhood summit in June 2023 with 43 child presenters followed by a workshop in August 2023 to unpack key themes, issues and solutions. Young Queenslanders have also had the opportunity to engage with the QFCC’s Young Leaders Summit in Cairns and to participate in the QFCC’s Youth Summit which occurred in April 2024 during Youth Week. The QFCC’s Youth Summit was an opportunity for young people to speak directly to decision-makers about all that is important to them allowing for robust solutions-driven conversations.³⁰⁰

Queensland has a growing number of accountability mechanisms for monitoring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. *Safe and Supported* emphasises the importance of all agencies collecting, sharing and measuring safety and wellbeing outcomes for young people to measure progress and to provide tailored responses to keep children safe.³⁰¹ One of its focus areas is improved information sharing, data development and analysis. In addition to contributing to the work of the Productivity Commission and the AIHW, Queensland has a

growing number of accountability mechanisms for monitoring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people which include:

- The QFCC's *Growing Up in Queensland 2024* report and *Data explorer* which are comprehensive reference points for researchers, policy- and decision-makers, containing data and evidence about key issues affecting Queensland families. Acknowledging the regional diversity within Queensland, both the report and the dashboard provide data at both the state and regional levels.³⁰²
- The *Australian Child and Youth Wellbeing Atlas*, which maps information on children and young people up to age 24 in communities across Australia, enables the visualisation, analysis and monitoring of health and wellbeing metrics for children and young people.³⁰³
- The QFCC's *Queensland Child Rights Report 2023*, which details the state of children's rights in Queensland. The report analyses how Queensland upholds children's rights, and it identifies the changes needed to embed a child rights approach across government policy, legislation and systems to deliver better, more equitable outcomes for Queensland children.³⁰⁴
- The QFCC's *First Nations Children's Report* which showcases stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families who are thriving when they can fully enjoy their right to family, community, culture and Country. The report demonstrates the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and shows the positive outcomes that are possible when their rights are upheld.³⁰⁵
- The QFCC's Principle Focus dashboard. In August 2021, the QFCC released the *Principle Focus* report³⁰⁶ and committed to monitor and examine the dynamics and drivers of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across Queensland's child protection system. To increase accountability and transparency, in 2024, we released our Principle Focus dashboard. The dashboard involves an in-depth, rights-based analysis of the ATSI CPP implementation across the system and draws on a state and regional data.³⁰⁷
- DTATSIPCA produces an annual *Closing the Gap Snapshot Report* which includes a visual presentation of data that is informative, accessible and easy to understand, so that First Nations Queenslanders can consider what is happening at a local level, to make decisions about their futures.³⁰⁸
- The Board conducts systemic reviews following the death of a child connected to the child protection system.

What needs further improvement?

The well-known issues driving performance in our statutory systems providing clear guidance about what needs to improve. A review of more than 3000 recommendations issued over twelve years in 61 state, territory and Commonwealth reports has identified the six core issues plaguing Australia's child protection and youth justice systems. These systemic issues have been consolidated in a recent report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and

Australian Human Rights Commission.³⁰⁹ The report's thematic analysis identified six systems-level issues, repeatedly identified within the evidence-based recommendations of reports. The repetitiveness of these themes illustrates both that these core issues have not yet been successfully addressed by governments but also the complexity of addressing such systems-level barriers. Identified issues were:

- Inadequate cross-system information sharing, collaboration and coordination across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Limited First Nations partnership and self-determination across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Lack of mechanisms for oversight, monitoring and transparency across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Limited child protection and youth justice workforce capacity and support.
- Inadequate levels of investment across the child protection and youth justice systems.
- Limited opportunities for child voice and participation within the child protection and youth justice systems.

The consistency of these systems-level themes over this 12-year period suggests there is a wealth of knowledge, insight and data on the services and supports that would be effective in reducing the contact that vulnerable children and young people have with child protection and youth justice.

Greater accountability and transparency regarding children in watch houses. Due to the separation of responsibilities across government agencies, complicated by a web of administration and bureaucracy, our review found that no one agency is directly responsible or accountable for the time a child spends in a watch house nor the impact this has on their wellbeing. The review found that accountability was complicated by compartmentalised roles across police, courts, and youth justice; an umbrella of 10 oversight and complaint bodies charged with discrete responsibilities for the wellbeing of children. We acknowledge the commencement of the Independent Inspector of Detention Services and the reviews now occurring and encourage prioritised responses to the individual and systemic outcomes of these reviews.

First Nations data sovereignty is limited in Queensland. There have been some steps towards First Nations data sovereignty in Queensland, with the recent passing of the *Public Records Bill 2023 (Qld)*, to update the current legislation that is silent on the interests and perspectives of First Nations peoples. The Bill comes into force in December 2024 and includes the establishment of a First Nations Advisory Group to enshrine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making into the management of public records.^{310, 311} Queensland Government agencies hold substantial data assets (information or knowledge in any format or medium) about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (collectively or individually), which have a variety of uses, including measuring the performance of services, prioritising funding and monitoring the outcomes of services. However, the right of First Nations peoples to exercise ownership of data through collection, creation, access, analysis and interpretation,

management, dissemination and reuse has been limited. The exclusion of First Nations peoples from exercising ownership over data can result in skewed data narratives that have a deficit focus and whose to which access is restricted.^{312, 313}

The Youth Justice Reform Select Committee, which was examining ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime, was dissolved without finalising its report and recommendations, although there is an ongoing need for its work in Queensland. Formed in October 2023, the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee was established to conduct an inquiry to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime. The committee conducted 26 meetings, 13 public hearings and nine public briefings, as well as receiving more than 200 submissions. This bipartisan committee was dissolved in April 2024, having only tabled an interim report.³¹⁴ The dissolution of the Committee highlights that the coordinated and holistic approach to youth justice reform that is needed to improve outcomes for community safety and for young people is not yet operating effectively in Queensland. Further work is needed to achieve a coordinated service system that delivers evidence-based reforms to safeguard and rehabilitate children so they are less likely to interact with the justice system.

Financial performance

Financial summary 2023–2024

We manage our budget closely while ensuring maximum impact is delivered within our funding means. To this effect, we delivered a very minor underspend of \$12,000, or less than 0.1 per cent of our 2023–2024 budget.

Our 2023–2024 original budget was \$12.66 million including \$1.3 million of limited-life funding to support statutory functions and to respond to emergent government priorities, (expires on 30 June 2024) and a \$1.3 million allocation to fund the Board.

Our employees are our greatest investment, with \$9.5 million actual spend (representing 75.1% of our total expenditure) dedicated to employee and employee-related expenses. Other significant costs included property expenses (\$644,215), contractors and consultants (\$883,289), finance and Information and Communications Technology (\$783,704) and travel (\$191,720).

During the year we used this budget to consolidate and strengthen our relationships with regional stakeholders, with a significant (100%) increase in travel expenditure as compared to the prior year. We collaborated with third party organisations to advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children, and made targeted efforts to raise awareness and advocate for children and their families by partnering with several agencies.

We also upheld our specific commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families by providing significant funding to the 2023–2024 Young, Black & Proud Scholarships, and supporting DIYDG for the Growing Our Way initiative, among others.

2024–2025 budget announcement

Over the course of the year, we worked with Queensland Treasury regarding the ongoing funding of the Commission. Consequently, in the 2024–2025 budget the government allocated the QFCC \$14.0 million, an increase of \$472,000 on the 2023–2024 original budget:

- \$1.173 million over two years for three additional FTE and \$0.206 million for one additional FTE ongoing to support the Board secretariat
- \$1.3 million in 2024–2025 for seven FTE staff to support our First Nations focussed work, and an additional \$200,000 to expand the Young, Black & Proud Scholarship program in 2024–2025.

This is the first time that a government has provided explicit resourcing for the QFCC. The one-year funding provides an opportunity for the government to consider the establishment for an Independent First Nations Children’s Commissioner in alignment with the public commitment to deliver this reform.

The additional resources for the Board Secretariat enable an increase in reviewing cases that have backlogged over the last three years. The additional funding will also support the implementation of new approaches to improve staff wellbeing by better addressing the vicarious trauma that can arise in this work stream. Recruitment has commenced and a contract with Converge to assist in the development of a *Trauma and Wellbeing Strategy* for the Board Secretariat and the Child Death Prevention team has been entered.

Financial results

Queensland Family and Child Commission	Actual 2023–2024 \$'000	Actual 2022–2023 \$'000
Income from continuing operations		
Grants and other contributions	12,752	12,031
Other revenue	281	183
User charges	445	-
Total income from continuing operations	13,478	12,214
Employee expenses	9,529	8,674
Supplies and services	2,893	2,645
Depreciation and amortisation	4	5
Other expenses	1,050	544
Total expenses from continuing operations	13,466	11,868
Operating results from continuing operations	12	346

Financial position

Queensland Family and Child Commission	Actual 2023–2024 \$'000	Actual 2022–2023 \$'000
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	3,754	4,279
Receivables	449	266
Total current assets	4,203	4,545
Non-current assets		
Plant and equipment	7	13
Intangible assets		-
Total non-current assets	7	13
Total assets	4,210	4,558
Current liabilities		
Payables	196	599
Accrued employee benefits	294	251
Total liabilities	490	850
Net assets	3,720	3,708
Equity		
Contributed equity	2,427	2,427
Accumulated surplus	1,293	1,281
Total equity	3,720	3,708

Further information

As required by annual reporting guidelines, information relating to overseas travel expenditure in 2023–2024 is published online through the government’s Open Data website.

The QFCC engaged no consultancies in 2023–2024.

Priorities

We will work to embed changes across the structure of the QFCC in readiness for our expanded range of functions that may come into effect with the passing of the *Child Safe Organisations Bill*. We will implement the Commission’s Reframing the Relationship Plan and continue to utilise digital dashboards to increase the reach and accessibility of our data.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Financial Statements

for the year ended 30 June 2024

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Financial Statements 2023-24

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Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

for the year ended 30 June 2024

	Notes	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
Income from Continuing Operations			
User charges	3.	445	-
Grants and other contributions	4.	12,752	12,031
Other revenue	5.	281	183
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Income from Continuing Operations		13,478	12,214
Expenses from Continuing Operations			
Employee expenses	6.	9,529	8,674
Supplies and services	7.	2,893	2,645
Depreciation and amortisation		4	5
Other expenses	8.	1,040	544
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Expenses from Continuing Operations		13,466	11,868
Operating Result from Continuing Operations		12	346
		<hr/>	<hr/>
Total Comprehensive Income		12	346
		<hr/>	<hr/>

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

as at 30 June 2024

	Notes	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
Current Assets			
Cash and cash equivalents		3,754	4,279
Receivables	9.	449	266
Total Current Assets		4,203	4,545
Non Current Assets			
Plant and equipment		7	13
Total Non Current Assets		7	13
Total Assets		4,210	4,558
Current Liabilities			
Payables	10.	196	599
Accrued employee benefits	11.	294	251
Total Current Liabilities		490	850
Total Liabilities		490	850
Net Assets		3,720	3,708
Equity			
Contributed equity		2,427	2,427
Accumulated surplus		1,293	1,281
Total Equity		3,720	3,708

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

for the year ended 30 June 2024

	Accumulated Surplus \$'000	Contributed Equity \$'000	TOTAL \$'000
Balance as at 1 July 2022	935	2,427	3,362
Operating Result from Continuing Operations	346	-	346
Balance as at 30 June 2023	1,281	2,427	3,708
Balance as at 1 July 2023	1,281	2,427	3,708
Operating Result from Continuing Operations	12	-	12
Balance as at 30 June 2024	1,293	2,427	3,720

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

for the year ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023
	\$'000	\$'000
Cash flows from operating activities		
<i>Inflows:</i>		
User charges	401	-
Grants and other contributions	12,752	12,031
GST input tax credits from ATO	340	342
GST collected from customers	42	5
Other revenue	281	183
<i>Outflows:</i>		
Employee expenses	(9,531)	(8,529)
Supplies and services	(3,327)	(2,512)
GST paid to suppliers	(407)	(324)
GST remitted to ATO	(39)	(5)
Other	(1,038)	(567)
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities	(525)	625
Net increase (decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	(525)	625
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of financial year	4,279	3,654
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	3,754	4,279

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS for the year ended 30 June 2024

NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF CASH FLOW

Reconciliation of Operating Result to Net Cash provided by Operating Activities

	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
Operating surplus/(deficit)	12	346
Depreciation and amortisation expense	4	5
Loss on disposal of plant & equipment	2	-
<i>Changes in assets and liabilities:</i>		
(Increase)/decrease in receivables	(120)	151
(Increase)/decrease in GST input tax credits receivable	(63)	19
(Increase)/decrease in prepayments	-	47
Increase/(decrease) in accounts payable	(403)	66
Increase/(decrease) in accrued employee benefits	43	(9)
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities	(525)	625

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

Section 1: About the QFCC and this Financial Report

- Note 1: Basis of Financial Statement Preparation
- Note 2: Objectives of the QFCC

Section 2: Notes about our Financial Performance

- Note 3: User Charges
- Note 4: Grants and Contributions
- Note 5: Other Revenue
- Note 6: Employee Expenses
- Note 7: Supplies and Services
- Note 8: Other Expenses

Section 3: Notes about our Financial Position

- Note 9: Receivables
- Note 10: Payables
- Note 11: Accrued Employee Benefits

Section 4: Notes about Risks and Other Accounting Uncertainties

- Note 12: Commitments
- Note 13: Contingencies
- Note 14: Financial Risk Disclosures
- Note 15: Events Occurring After Balance Date
- Note 16: Future Impact of Accounting Standards Not Yet Effective

Section 5: Notes on our Performance compared to Budget

- Note 17: Budgetary Reporting Disclosures

Section 6: Other Information

- Note 18: Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures
- Note 19: Taxation
- Note 20: Insurance
- Note 21: Accounting Estimates and Judgements
- Note 22: First Year Application of New Accounting Standards or Change in Accounting Policy
- Note 23: Climate Risk Disclosures

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

1. Basis of Financial Statement Preparation

General Information

This financial report covers the Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC). It has no controlled entities.

The QFCC is a statutory body established on 1 July 2014 as part of the Queensland Government's response to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry (Carmody Inquiry). The QFCC influences change that improves the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's children and their families. The QFCC reviews and improves the systems that protect and safeguard Queensland's children.

The head office and principal place of business of the QFCC is:

Level 8, 63 George Street, Brisbane.

A description of the nature of the QFCC's operations and its principal activities are included in the notes to the financial statements.

Compliance with Prescribed Requirements

The QFCC has prepared these financial statements in compliance with section 39 of the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*. The financial statements comply with Queensland Treasury's Minimum Reporting Requirements for reporting periods beginning on or after 1 July 2023.

The QFCC is a not-for-profit entity and these general purpose financial statements are prepared on an accrual basis (except for the statement of cash flows which is prepared on a cash basis) in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards and Interpretations applicable to not-for-profit entities.

Presentation

Currency and Rounding

Amounts included in the financial statements are in Australian dollars and rounded to the nearest \$1,000 or, where that amount is \$500 or less, to zero, unless disclosure of the full amount is specifically required. Due to rounding, totals may not add exactly.

Comparatives

Comparative information reflects the audited 2022-23 financial statements.

Current / Non-Current Classification

Assets and liabilities are classified as either 'current' or 'non-current' in the Statement of Financial Position and associated notes.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

1. Basis of Financial Statement Preparation (cont'd)

Presentation (cont'd)

Current / Non-Current Classification (cont'd)

Assets are classified as 'current' where their carrying amount is expected to be realised within 12 months after the reporting date. Liabilities are classified as 'current' when they are due to be settled within 12 months after the reporting date, or the QFCC does not have an unconditional right to defer settlement to beyond 12 months after the reporting date. All other assets and liabilities are classified as non-current.

Basis of Measurement

Historical cost is used as the measurement basis in this report.

Under the historical cost, assets are recorded at the amount of cash or cash equivalents paid or the fair value of the consideration given to acquire assets at the time of acquisition. Liabilities are recorded at the amount of proceeds received in exchange for the obligation or at the amounts of cash or cash equivalents expected to be paid to satisfy the liability in the normal course of business.

Accounting Policy - Cash and Cash Equivalents

For the purposes of the statement of financial position and the statement of cash flows, cash assets include all cash and cheques receipted but not banked as at 30 June.

Shared Service Provider

The Corporate Administration Agency (CAA) provides the QFCC with corporate services under the Shared Services Provider model. The fees and terms of the services are agreed through a Service Level Agreement, negotiated annually and include:

- Financial Services
- Human Resources, Recruitment and Payroll
- Information Systems and Support
- Procurement Services
- Internal Audit Services.

Going concern

The financial statements were prepared on a going concern basis on the assumption that QFCC will continue its operations in the foreseeable future.

Authorisation of Financial Statements for Issue

The financial statements are authorised for issue by the Principal Commissioner and the A/Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services at the date of signing the Management Certificate.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

2. Objectives of the QFCC

The QFCC has the following objectives:

- Ensuring systems are accountable for the impact they have on children and families.
- Raising awareness and advocate for children and their families.
- Empower Queensland children, young people and their families to influence decisions that affect their lives.
- Support, connect and collaborate with organisations that advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of children.
- Build our capacity, capability and culture to achieve our vision.

	2024	2023
	\$'000	\$'000
3. User Charges		
Sales of goods and Services:		
Revenue from contracts with customers	445	-
Total	445	-

Accounting Policy - Revenue from contracts with customers (User charges)

Revenue from contracts with customers is recognised when the QFCC transfers control over a good or service to the customer. The below paragraph provides information about the nature of the engagement and timing of the satisfaction of performance obligations, significant payment terms and revenue recognition for QFCC's user charges revenue from contracts with customers. The transaction is accounted for under AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers*.

During the 2023-24 Financial Year, the QFCC entered into a contract with the Department of Education to engage and undertake consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and stakeholders, to inform the establishment of a First Nations Early Childhood Education, Education and Training Consultative Body. The services are provided over 7 months and the QFCC recognises the revenue after each performance obligation is met. A contract asset is recognised for expenditure incurred but not yet invoiced at 30 June 2024 (note 9).

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

	2024	2023
	\$'000	\$'000
4. Grants and Contributions		
Grants received from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General	12,752	12,028
Grants received from the Qld Mental Health Commission	-	3
Total	12,752	12,031

Accounting Policy - Grants and Contributions

Grants revenue arise from non-exchange transactions where the QFCC does not directly give approximately equal value to the grantor.

Where the grant agreement is enforceable and contains sufficiently specific performance obligations for the QFCC to transfer goods or services to a third-party on the grantor's behalf, the transaction is accounted for under AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers*. In this case, revenue is initially deferred (as a contract liability) and recognised as or when the performance obligations are satisfied.

Otherwise, the grant is accounted for under AASB 1058 *Income of Not-for-Profit Entities*, whereby revenue is recognised upon receipt of the grant funding, except for special purpose capital grants received to construct non-financial assets to be controlled by the QFCC. Special purpose capital grants are recognised as unearned revenue when received, and subsequently recognised progressively as revenue as the QFCC satisfies its obligations under the grant through construction of the asset.

The QFCC received grant funding from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The funding has been recognised as revenue on receipt under AASB 1058 as the QFCC's obligations are not sufficiently specific.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

	2024	2023
	\$'000	\$'000
5. Other Revenue		
Other operating revenue	5	4
Interest	276	179
Total	281	183
	2024	2023
	\$'000	\$'000
6. Employee Expenses		
<i>Employee Benefits</i>		
Wages and salaries	6,949	6,305
Employer superannuation contributions	1,017	865
Annual leave levy	715	671
Long service leave levy	176	166
<i>Employee Related Expenses</i>		
Payroll tax	412	377
Other employee related expenses	260	290
Total	9,529	8,674

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

6. Employee Expenses (cont'd)

	2024	2023
Full-Time Equivalent Employees *	65	58

* FTE data as at 30 June 2024 (based upon the fortnight ending 28 June 2024).

Accounting Policy - Wages and Salaries

Wages and salaries due but unpaid at reporting date are recognised in the Statement of Financial Position at the current salary rates. As the QFCC expects such liabilities to be wholly settled within 12 months of reporting date, the liabilities are recognised at undiscounted amounts.

Accounting Policy - Sick Leave

Prior history indicates that on average, sick leave taken each reporting period is less than the entitlement accrued. This is expected to continue in future periods. Accordingly, it is unlikely that existing accumulated entitlements will be used by employees and no liability for unused sick leave entitlements is recognised. As sick leave is non-vesting, an expense is recognised for this leave as it is taken.

Accounting Policy - Annual Leave

Under the Queensland Government's Annual Leave Central Scheme (ALCS), a levy is made on the QFCC to cover the cost of employees' annual leave (including leave loading and on-costs). The levies are expensed in the period in which they are payable. Amounts paid to employees for annual leave are claimed from the scheme quarterly in arrears.

Accounting Policy - Long Service Leave

Under the Queensland Government's Long Service Leave Scheme (LSLS), a levy is made on the QFCC to cover the cost of employees' long service leave. The levies are expensed in the period in which they are payable. Amounts paid to employees for long service leave are claimed from the scheme quarterly in arrears.

Accounting Policy - Superannuation

Post-employment benefits for superannuation are provided through defined contribution (accumulation) plans or the Queensland Government's defined benefit plan (the former QSuper defined benefit categories now administered by the Government Division of the Australian Retirement Trust) as determined by the employee's conditions of employment.

Defined Contribution Plans - Contributions are made to eligible complying superannuation funds based on the rates specified in the relevant EBA or other conditions of employment. Contributions are expensed when they are paid or become payable following completion of the employee's service each pay period.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

6. Employee Expenses (cont'd)

Accounting Policy - Superannuation (cont'd)

Defined Benefit Plan - The liability for defined benefits is held on a whole-of-Government basis and reported in those financial statements pursuant to *AASB 1049 Whole of Government and General Government Sector Financial Reporting*. The amount of contributions for defined benefit plan obligations is based upon the rates determined on the advice of the State Actuary. Contributions are paid by the QFCC at the specified rate following completion of the employee's service each pay period. The QFCC's obligations are limited to those contributions paid.

Accounting Policy - Workers' Compensation Premiums

The QFCC pays premiums to WorkCover Queensland in respect of its obligations for employee compensation. Workers' compensation insurance is a consequence of employing employees, but is not counted in an employee's total remuneration package. It is not employee benefits and is recognised separately as employee related expenses.

Key management personnel and remuneration disclosures

Key management personnel and remuneration disclosures are detailed in Note 18.

	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
7. Supplies and Services		
Building services *	644	895
Administration costs	143	124
Contractors and consultants	883	621
Corporate services provider costs	630	513
Advertising and promotions	123	101
Minor plant and equipment	35	72
Other supplies and services	435	319
Total	2,893	2,645

Office accommodation

* Payments for non-specialised commercial office accommodation under the Queensland Government Accommodation Office (QGAO) framework arise from non-lease arrangements with the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works (2023: Department of Energy and Public Works), who has substantive substitution rights over the assets used within these schemes. Building Services includes office rental payments to QGAO of \$472k (2023: \$729k) and these are expensed in the periods in which they are incurred. Rental payments are reduced by monthly rental incentives for the full 2023-24 financial year.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
8. Other Expenses		
Insurance premiums (QGIF)	5	5
External audit fees *	27	28
Loss on disposal of assets	2	-
Sponsorships and Grants	982	484
Trustee/Board Fees	24	27
Total	1,040	544

* Total audit fees quoted in the Queensland Audit Office's plan for 2023-24 is \$26,750.
(2022-23: \$25,000).

	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
9. Receivables		
Trade debtors	40	9
GST receivable	153	90
Annual leave reimbursements	170	131
Long service leave reimbursement	42	36
Contract asset*	44	-
Total	449	266

* The contract asset is recognised on financial year end in relation to the contract with the Department of Education. (note 3)

Accounting Policy - Receivables

Receivables are measured at amortised cost which approximates their fair values at reporting date.

Trade debtors are recognised at the amounts due at the time of sale or service delivery (i.e. the agreed purchase/contract price). Settlement of these amounts is required within 30 days from invoice date.

Impairment of Receivables

Accounting Policy - Impairment of Receivables

The loss allowance for trade and other debtors reflect lifetime expected credit losses and incorporates reasonable supportable forward-looking information. Economic changes impacting the QFCC's debtors, and relevant industry data from part of the QFCC's impairment assessment.

No impairment losses have been recognised for receivables in 2023-24.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
10. Payables		
Trade creditors	150	516
Other payables	46	83
Total	196	599

Accounting Policy

Trade creditors are recognised upon receipt of the goods or services ordered and are measured at the agreed purchase/contract price, gross of applicable trade and other discounts. Amounts owing are unsecured and are generally settled on 30 day terms.

	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
11. Accrued Employee Benefits		
<u>Current</u>		
Annual leave levy payable	235	208
Paid Parental Leave	4	-
Long service leave levy payable	55	43
Total	294	251

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

11. Accrued Employee Benefits (cont'd)

Accounting Policy

No provision for annual leave or long service leave is recognised in the QFCC's financial statements as the liability is held on a whole-of-Government basis and reported in those financial statements pursuant to AASB 1049 *Whole of Government and General Government Sector Financial Reporting*.

12. Commitments

Other Expense Commitments

The other material expenditure commitments of the QFCC (inclusive of non-recoverable GST input tax credits) contracted for at reporting date but not recognised in the accounts are payable as follows:

	2024	2023
	\$'000	\$'000
Not later than one year	1,486	1,510
Later than one year and not later than five years	745	1,548
Total	2,231	3,058

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

13. Contingencies

There were no other known contingent assets or liabilities as at 30 June 2024.

14. Financial Risk Disclosures

Financial Instrument Categories

Financial assets and financial liabilities are recognised in the Statement of Financial Position when the QFCC becomes party to the contractual provisions of the financial instrument. No financial assets and financial liabilities have been offset and presented net in the Statement of Financial Position.

The QFCC has no financial assets/liabilities recognised at fair value.

The QFCC has the following categories of financial assets and financial liabilities:

Category	Note	2024 \$'000	2023 \$'000
Financial Assets			
Cash and cash equivalents		3,754	4,279
Financial assets at amortised cost:			
Receivables	9.	449	266
Total financial assets		4,203	4,545
Financial Liabilities			
Financial liabilities at amortised cost:			
Payables	10.	196	599
Total financial liabilities at amortised cost		196	599

Financial risk management

The activities undertaken by the QFCC do not expose it to any material credit, liquidity or market risk.

15. Events Occurring After Balance Date

No events have occurred after balance date that has a material effect on these financial statements.

16. Future Impact of Accounting Standards Not Yet Effective

At the date of authorisation of the financial report, there are no Australian accounting standards and interpretations with future effective dates that are applicable to the QFCC's activities or have no material impact on the QFCC.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

17. Budgetary Reporting Disclosures

This section contains explanations of major variances between the QFCC's actual 2023-24 financial results and the original budget presented to Parliament.

Budget to Actual Comparison - Statement of Comprehensive Income

		2024	2024	
	Variance	Actual	Original	Budget
	Notes	\$'000	budget	variance
			\$'000	\$'000
Income from Continuing Operations				
User charges	1.	445	-	445
Grants and other contributions		12,752	12,564	188
Other revenue	2.	281	97	184
Total Income from Continuing Operations		13,478	12,661	817
Expenses from Continuing Operations				
Employee expenses	3.	9,529	10,318	(789)
Supplies and services	4.	2,893	2,059	834
Depreciation and amortisation		4	5	(1)
Other expenses	5.	1,040	279	761
Total Expenses from Continuing Operations		13,466	12,661	805
Total Comprehensive Income		12	-	12

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

17. Budgetary Reporting Disclosures (cont'd)

Budget to Actual Comparison - Statement of Financial Position

		2024	2024	
	Variance	Actual	Original	Budget
	Notes	\$'000	Budget	Variance
			\$'000	\$'000
Current Assets				
Cash and cash equivalents		3,754	3,642	(112)
Receivables		449	446	(3)
Other		-	47	47
Total Current Assets		4,203	4,135	(68)
Non-Current Assets				
Plant and equipment		7	8	1
Total Non-Current Assets		7	8	1
Total Assets		4,210	4,143	(67)
Current Liabilities				
Payables	6.	196	520	324
Accrued employee benefits	7.	294	260	(34)
Total Current Liabilities		490	780	290
Total Liabilities		490	780	290
Net Assets		3,720	3,363	(357)

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

17. Budgetary Reporting Disclosures (cont'd)

Budget to Actual Comparison - Statement of Cash Flows

		2024	2024	
	Variance	Actual	Original	Budget
	Notes	\$'000	Budget	Variance
			\$'000	\$'000
Cash flows from operating activities				
<i>Inflows:</i>				
User charges	8.	401	-	401
Grants and other contributions		12,752	12,564	188
GST input tax credits from ATO		340	-	340
GST collected from customers		42	-	42
Interest receipts	9.	276	97	179
Other	10.	5	253	(248)
<i>Outflows:</i>				
Employee expenses	11.	(9,531)	(10,318)	787
Supplies and services	12.	(3,327)	(2,324)	(1,003)
GST paid to suppliers		(407)	-	(407)
GST remitted to ATO		(39)	-	(39)
Other	13.	(1,038)	(279)	(759)
Net cash provided by (used in) operating activities		(525)	(7)	(518)
Net (decrease) in cash held		(525)	(7)	(518)
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of financial year		4,279	3,649	630
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year		3,754	3,642	112

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

17. Budgetary Reporting Disclosures (cont'd)

This section contains explanations of major variances between the QFCC's actual 2023-24 financial results and the original budget presented to Parliament.

Explanations of Major Variances

Statement of Comprehensive Income

1. The QFCC entered a contract with a customer during the financial year, which was not anticipated at the time of the development of the Original budget.
2. The variance is primarily in interest received and is due to a combination of a higher cash balance being maintained during the year and higher interest rates.
3. Delays in filling vacant positions and staff on extended leave or secondment to other Government agencies have contributed to lower employee cost.
4. The increase in supplies and services is mainly due to outsourcing of projects which vary each year as projects are developed. Some contract labour was used to cover for short term needs.
5. The increase in other expenses is primarily due to sponsoring initiatives that align to the QFCC strategic objectives.

Statement of Financial Position

6. The decrease in accounts payable is mainly due to the timing of invoices received from suppliers and an additional payment run at the end of June, clearing the majority of creditors balances.
7. The decrease in Accrued Employee Benefits is predominantly due to the timing of the pay period, with the budget based on historical data.

Statement of Cash Flows

8. The QFCC entered a contract with a customer during the financial year, which was not anticipated at the time of the development of the Original budget.
9. The variance in interest received is due to a combination of a higher cash balance being maintained during the year and higher interest rates.
10. The variance is due to receipts from the ATO treated as other revenue in the SDS.
11. Delays in filling vacant positions and staff on extended leave or secondment to other Government agencies have contributed to lower employee cost.
12. The increase in supplies and services is mainly due to outsourcing of projects vary each year as projects are developed. Some contract labour was used to cover for short term needs.
13. The increase in other expenses is primarily due to sponsoring initiatives that align to the QFCC strategic objectives.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures

Details of Key Management Personnel

The following details for key management personnel include those positions that had authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of the QFCC during 2023-24 and 2022-23.

Position	Position Responsibility
Principal Commissioner & CEO	<p>As the Principal Commissioner of the agency, the role provides strategic and cross-sectorial leadership and direction to government and non-government agencies to strengthen laws, policies, practices and services that improve the child protection and family support system.</p> <p>The role is responsible for providing expert advice on child protection practices, underpinned by research, to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.</p> <p>This role is also the Chair of the independent Child Death Review Board.</p>
Commissioner	<p>The Commissioner provides strategic and cross-sectorial leadership and direction to government and non-government agencies to strengthen laws, policies, practices and services that improve the child protection and family support system.</p> <p>The role has a strong focus on collaboration, partnerships and networks across the sector and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.</p>
Executive Director, Operations	<p>The Executive Director, Operations, leads the data intelligence, analysis, audit and review portfolios of the QFCC. The role translates the strategy set by the Commissioners into a multi-year oversight program – working across the business to influence all programs of work in an authoritative and collaborative manner. The role designs and manages a whole-of-commission strategic approach to the delivery of system monitoring and reviews and produces work and maintains relationships that are successful in driving impactful change to the systems that uphold the safety, rights and wellbeing of children and their families.</p> <p>The role directly supports and represents the Principal Commissioner to deliver state-wide system improvements whilst leading cross-Commission, cross-government, and cross-sector collaboration.</p>

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Details of Key Management Personnel (cont'd)

Position	Position Responsibility
Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services	<p>The Executive Director, Government Relations and Corporate Services ensures the Commission's governance, people and finance systems and decision making processes are robust and our compliance with State and Commonwealth laws.</p> <p>The role ensures Commission's parliamentary and cross-government engagement is impactful and targeted and that we are aware of, and have opportunity to be involved in, emerging issues, including government initiatives, reforms and legislation.</p> <p>The role ensures the integrity of Child Death Review Board Secretariat and leads the systemic process of reviewing government service delivery to children who have died whilst known to the child protection system to identify system improvements, and supports the Board to make impactful recommendations.</p> <p>The role maintains a comprehensive and contemporary child death register through which we actively facilitate research and promote information to support policy and legislation development that prevents further child deaths.</p>
Executive Director, First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy	<p>The Executive Director, First Nations and Child Rights Advocacy, leads the delivery of First Nations and child rights strategies, partnerships and functions within the QFCC.</p> <p>The role is accountable for building the capacity, capability and integrity of the Commission's delivery against its explicit commitments to child rights and First Nations children. The role manages complex delivery processes requiring a proven track record as a thought leader that draws on collaboration, strong networks, and the ability to foster a capable and collaborative workforce.</p>
Director, Corporate Services	<p>The Director, Corporate Services oversees the effective and quality delivery of the corporate services functions of the QFCC.</p> <p>These functions include finance, human resources, governance, business and facilities support services, information and communication technology and contracts and procurement. The role also leads and manages the development, implementation and monitoring of risk management, planning processes and provides integrated organisation performance advice to support the Executive Leadership Board in setting, steering and reviewing the Commission's strategic direction.</p>

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Details of Key Management Personnel (cont'd)

Position	Position Responsibility
Director, Media Comms & Engagement	The Director, Media Comms & Engagement provides stewardship for the QFCC advocacy in collaboration with the broader QFCC and provides leadership and authoritative advice on media and public relations direction to the Commissioners and Executive Leadership Board. The role also provides leadership and authoritative advice on best practice youth participation and purposeful communication to QFCC stakeholders.
Director, Monitoring & Oversight	The Director, Monitoring & Oversight provides leadership and oversight of the System Review and Analysis, Insights & reporting functions. The role manages whole-of-system reviews and provides high-quality, expert advice to the Principal Commissioner. The role prepares and publish findings, reports and briefs on behalf of the QFCC and act as the leading analyst and writer on these publications and acts as the primary contact for enquiries and consult and negotiate effectively in a complex environment with competing stakeholder priorities.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

KMP Remuneration Policies

Remuneration for the Principal Commissioner and Commissioner are set by the Governor in Council in accordance with Division 3, *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*. The remuneration and other terms of employment for the other key executive management personnel are in accordance with directives issued under the *Public Sector Act 2022* by the Public Sector Commission Chief Executive or the Minister responsible for public sector industrial relations.

Remuneration expenses for those KMP comprise the following components:

- Short term employee expenses, including:
 - Salaries, allowances and leave entitlements earned and expensed for the entire year, or for that part of the year during which the employee occupied a KMP position.
 - Non-monetary benefits - consisting of provision of vehicle parking together with fringe benefits tax applicable to the benefit.
- Long term employee expenses including amounts expensed in respect of long service leave entitlements earned.
- Post-employment expenses including amounts expensed in respect of employer superannuation obligations.
- Termination benefits are in accordance with government industrial instruments and individual contract of employment arrangements.
- Performance bonuses are not paid.

Remuneration Expense

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General's responsible Minister is identified as part of the Commission's KMP, consistent with additional guidance included in the revised version of AASB 124 Related Party Disclosures. That Minister is the Honourable Yvette D'Ath MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

Ministerial remuneration entitlements are outlined in the Legislative Assembly of Queensland's Members' Remuneration Handbook. The Commission does not bear any cost of remuneration of Ministers. The majority of Ministerial entitlements are paid by the Legislative Assembly, with the remaining entitlements being provided by Ministerial Services Branch within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. As all Ministers are reported as KMP of the Queensland Government, aggregate remuneration expenses for all Ministers is disclosed in the Queensland General Government and Whole of Government Consolidated Financial Statements, which are published as part of Queensland Treasury's Report on State Finances.

The following disclosures focus on the expenses incurred by the QFCC attributable to non-Ministerial KMP during the respective reporting periods. The amounts disclosed are determined on the same basis as expenses recognised in the statement of comprehensive income.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Remuneration Expense (cont'd)

1 July 2023 - 30 June 2024

Position	Short Term Employee Expenses		Long Term Employee Expenses	Post-Employment Expenses	Termination Benefits	Total Expenses
	Monetary Expenses \$'000	Non-Monetary Benefits \$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Chief Executive Officer & Principal Commissioner	302	3	8	38	-	351
Commissioner	222	5	6	32	-	265
Executive Director, Operations (from 23/10/2023). Vacant 01/07/2023 - 22/10/2023	141	3	4	17	-	165
A/Executive Director, Operations (25/06/2024 - 30/06/2024)	4	-	-	-	-	4
Executive Director, Government Relations & Corporate Services (17/07/2023 - 08/09/2023)	28	3	-	7	-	38
A/Executive Director, Government Relations & Corporate Services (from 25/09/2023)	146	3	4	20	-	173
A/Executive Director, Government Relations & Corporate Services (12/06/2024 - 24/06/2024)	6	0	-	1	-	7
Executive Director, First Nations & Child Rights Advocacy (01/07/2023 - 22/09/2023). Vacant 23/09/2023 - 08/03/2024	41	3	1	10	-	55
A/Executive Director, First Nations & Child Rights Advocacy (09/03/2024 - 08/04/2024). Vacant 9/4/24 to 30/06/2024	102	2	3	12	-	119
Director, Corporate Services	183	-	4	21	-	208
Director, Media Comms & Engagement	149	4	4	20	-	177
Director Monitoring & Oversight (01/07/2023 to 05/04/2024)	122	5	3	16	-	146
A/Director, Monitoring & Oversight (from 23/04/2024)	23	-	1	3	-	27
Total Remuneration	1,469	31	38	197	-	1,735

- Following the resignation of the Executive Director, First Nations & Child Rights Advocacy, the position was temporarily filled until early April 2024. Recruitment to fill this position permanently was finalised in early July 2024. This position was vacant from 23 September 2023 to 8 March 2024 and from 9 April to 30 June 2024.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Remuneration Expense (cont'd)

1 July 2022 - 30 June 2023

Position	Short Term Employee Expenses		Long Term Employee	Post-Employment Expenses	Termination Benefits	Total Expenses
	Monetary Expenses \$'000	Non-Monetary Benefits \$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
Chief Executive Officer & Principal Commissioner	312	7	8	36	-	363
Commissioner	224	7	6	24	-	261
Senior Executive Director, Operations (from 01/07/22 to 14/04/23)	164	7	3	17	-	191
Executive Director, Government Relations & Corporate Services	184	8	5	20	-	217
Executive Director, First Nations & Child Rights Advocacy	185	7	5	21	-	218
Director Corporate Services	154	-	4	20	-	178
Director Advocacy, Media & Youth Participation (from 01/07/22 to 12/02/23)	81	4	2	10	-	97
A/Director Advocacy, Media & Youth Participation (from 13/02/23)	59	1	1	7	-	68
Director System Review	160	6	4	20	-	190
Director, Government Relations & Performance (from 01/07/22 to 18/11/22)	59	3	1	7	-	70
Total Remuneration	1,582	50	39	182	-	1,853

- Following the resignation of the Senior Executive Director, the position was re-designated and re-classified. A recruitment of the subsequent Executive Director position is expected to be finalised in early 2023-24. Following the resignation of the Director, Government Relations & Performance the position was

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

18. Key Management Personnel (KMP) and Related Party Disclosures (cont'd)

Related Party Transactions

Transactions with people/entities related to KMP

The QFCC did not enter into any transactions with people, or entities, related to Key Management Personnel during the audit period.

Transactions with other Queensland Government-controlled entities

The QFCC transacts with other Queensland Government controlled entities consistent with normal day-to-day business operations provided under normal commercial terms and conditions.

The QFCC's primary ongoing source of funding is grant funding provided in cash by Department of Justice and Attorney General (Note 4).

The QFCC's received revenue totalling \$445k for services outsourced by the Department of Education (Note 3)

The QFCC received services from CAA (Note 1) totalling \$481k and has an operating rental agreement with the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works for commercial office accommodation (Note 7) totalling \$633k.

19. Taxation

The QFCC is a state body as defined under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* and is exempt from Commonwealth taxation with the exception of Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) and Goods and Services Tax (GST). FBT and GST are the only Commonwealth taxes accounted for by the QFCC. GST credits receivable from, and GST payable to, the ATO are recognised under Note 9 - Receivables.

20. Insurance

The QFCC's non-current physical assets and other risks are insured through the Queensland Government Insurance Fund with premiums being paid on a risk assessment basis. In addition, the QFCC pays premiums to WorkCover Queensland in respect of its obligations for employee compensation.

21. Accounting Estimates and Judgements

The preparation of financial statements necessarily requires the determination and use of certain critical accounting estimates, assumptions, and management judgements that have the potential to cause a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year. Such estimates, judgements and underlying assumptions are reviewed on an ongoing basis. Revisions to accounting estimates are recognised in the period in which the estimate is revised and in future periods as relevant.

The QFCC has not recognised any balances that could potentially have a significant effect on these financial statements.

Queensland Family and Child Commission

NOTES TO AND FORMING PART OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023-24

22. First Year Application of New Accounting Standards or Change in Accounting Policy

Accounting standards applied for the first time

No new accounting standards or interpretations that apply to the QFCC for the first time in 2023-24 had any material impact on the financial statements.

Accounting Standards Early Adopted

No Australian Accounting Standards have been early adopted for 2023-24.

23. Climate Risk Disclosures

Whole-of-Government climate-related reporting

The State of Queensland, as the ultimate parent of the QFCC, has published a wide range of information and resources on climate related risks, strategies and actions accessible via

<https://www.energyandclimate.qld.gov.au/climate>

The Queensland Sustainability Report (QSR) outlines how the Queensland Government measures, monitors and manages sustainability risks and opportunities, including governance structures supporting policy oversight and implementation. To demonstrate progress, the QSR also provides time series data on key sustainability policy responses. The QSR is available via Queensland Treasury's website at

<https://www.treasury.qld.gov.au/programs-and-policies/queensland-sustainability-report>

Accounting estimates and judgements – climate-related risks

No adjustments to the carrying value of assets were recognised during the financial year as a result of climate-related risks impacting current accounting estimates and judgements. No other transactions have been recognised during the financial year specifically due to climate-related risks impacting the QFCC.

The QFCC continues to monitor the emergence of material climate-related risks that may impact the financial statements of the QFCC, including those arising under the Queensland Government's Queensland 2035 Clean Economy Pathway, and other Queensland Government climate-related policies or directives.

**Queensland Family and Child Commission
Management Certificate
for the year ended 30 June 2024**

These general purpose financial statements have been prepared pursuant to s.62(1) of the *Financial Accountability Act 2009* (the Act), s.39 of the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019* and other prescribed requirements. In accordance with s.62(1)(b) of the Act we certify that in our opinion:

- (i) the prescribed requirements for establishing and keeping the accounts have been complied with in all material respects; and
- (ii) the financial statements have been drawn up to present a true and fair view, in accordance with prescribed accounting standards, of the transactions of the Queensland Family and Child Commission for the financial year ended 30 June 2024 and of the financial position of the office at the end of that year.

We acknowledge responsibility under s.7 and s.11 of the *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019* for the establishment and maintenance, in all material respects, of an appropriate and effective system of internal controls and risk management processes with respect to financial reporting throughout the reporting period.



Luke Twyford

Principal Commissioner

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Date: 26 August 2024



Christopher Smith

A/Executive Director, Government Relations
and Corporate Services

Queensland Family and Child Commission

Date: 26/8/2024

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Principal Commissioner of Queensland Family and Child Commission

Report on the audit of the financial report

Opinion

I have audited the accompanying financial report of Queensland Family and Child Commission.

The financial report comprises the statement of financial position as at 30 June 2024, the statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in equity and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, notes to the financial statements including material accounting policy information, and the management certificate.

In my opinion, the financial report:

- a) gives a true and fair view of the entity's financial position as at 30 June 2024, and its financial performance and cash flows for the year then ended; and
- b) complies with the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019 and Australian Accounting Standards.

Basis for opinion

I conducted my audit in accordance with the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards*, which incorporate the Australian Auditing Standards. My responsibilities under those standards are further described in the *Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report* section of my report.

I am independent of the entity in accordance with the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 *Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including independence standards)* (the Code) that are relevant to my audit of the financial report in Australia. I have also fulfilled my other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the Code and the *Auditor-General Auditing Standards*.

I believe that the audit evidence I have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for my opinion.

Responsibilities of the entity for the financial report

The Principal Commissioner is responsible for the preparation of the financial report that gives a true and fair view in accordance with the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019 and Australian Accounting Standards, and for such internal control as the Principal Commissioner determines is necessary to enable the preparation of the financial report that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

The Principal Commissioner is also responsible for assessing the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters relating to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless it is intended to abolish the entity or to otherwise cease operations.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial report

My objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial report as a whole is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes my opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with the Australian Auditing Standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of this financial report.

A further description of my responsibilities for the audit of the financial report is located at the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board website at:

https://www.auasb.gov.au/auditors_responsibilities/ar4.pdf

This description forms part of my auditor's report.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements

Statement

In accordance with s.40 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, for the year ended 30 June 2024:

- a) I received all the information and explanations I required.
- b) I consider that, the prescribed requirements in relation to the establishment and keeping of accounts were complied with in all material respects.

Prescribed requirements scope

The prescribed requirements for the establishment and keeping of accounts are contained in the *Financial Accountability Act 2009*, any other Act and the Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019. The applicable requirements include those for keeping financial records that correctly record and explain the entity's transactions and account balances to enable the preparation of a true and fair financial report.



27 August 2024

Jacqueline Thornley
as delegate of the Auditor-General

Queensland Audit Office
Brisbane

Appendix A – Glossary of acronyms and initialisms

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANZCDR&PG	Australian and New Zealand Child Death Review and Prevention Group
ANZCCGA	Australian and New Zealand Children’s Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ATSICCOs	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations
ATSICHS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service
ATSICPP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
CAA	Corporate Administration Agency
CHQ	Children’s Health Queensland
CRQ	Children’s Rights Queensland
CSLAC	Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee
DTATSIPCA	Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts
DCSSDS	Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services
DFV	Domestic and family violence
DIYDG	Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good
DJAG	Department of Justice and Attorney-General
DoE	Department of Education
DPC	Department of the Premier and Cabinet
DFSV	Domestic, family and sexual violence
DYJ	Department of Youth Justice
FTE	Full-time equivalent
FWS	Family Wellbeing Services
IFS	Intensive Family Support
IFYS	Integrated Family and Youth Service
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
OOHC	Out-of-home care
OPG	Office of the Public Guardian
PCO	Permanent Care Order
QAO	Queensland Audit Office
QATSICPP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Peak

QFCC	Queensland Family and Child Commission
QMHC	Queensland Mental Health Commission
QPS	Queensland Police Service
QPSP	Queensland Paediatric Sepsis Program
RCS	Reportable Conduct Scheme
SCAN	Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect
Royal Commission	Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
SDA	Student Disciplinary Absence
SDS	Service Delivery Statement
SROs	Serious Repeat Offenders
The Act	<i>Family and Child Commission Act 2014</i>
TQKP	Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership
SUDI	Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Appendix B – Annual report compliance checklist

Summary of requirement	Basis for requirement	Annual report reference
Letter of compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A letter of compliance from the accountable officer or statutory body to the relevant Minister/s 	ARRs – section 7 p. III
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Table of contents Glossary 	ARRs – section 9.1 p. IV p. 188
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public availability 	ARRs – section 9.2 p. II
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FAA *Financial Accountability Act 2009*

FPMS *Financial and Performance Management Standard 2019*

ARRs *Annual report requirements for Queensland Government agencies*

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