

# RACP Health Care of Children in Care and Protection Services - Australia

A series of recommendations have been developed for health services, care and protection service providers and all levels of government, based on a set of core principles.

## Principles



The recommendations of the RACP *Health Care of Children in Care and Protection Services – Australia* position statement are in line with the following guiding principles:

- **Children and young people** involved with care and protection services are to be at the **forefront of decision making about their health**.
- **First Nations communities must have self-determination**, participating in decision-making concerning the care and protection of their children and young people.
- **First Nations solutions should be embedded at each stage** of policy development, service planning, design, implementation, and oversight of programs related to care and protection services.
- **Prevention, early support, and family restoration programs are essential** to help reduce the number of children and families involved with care and protection services.
- **Reunification must be at the centre** of care and protection services wherever possible.
- **Culturally appropriate support must be prioritised** by care and protection services.



## Recommendations



The RACP *Health Care of Children in Care and Protection Services - Australia* position statement considers current evidence and proposes strategies and recommendations to deliver effective health care to children and young people who are at risk of entering out-of-home care, are in out-of-home care, or are in contact with care and protection services across Australia. Recommendations are directed to the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments, as well as services and providers involved with children and young people, and care and protection, across Australia.



### Health services

The RACP recommends that health services:

1. Must appoint a healthcare navigator/coordinator for each child/young person entering or involved with care and protection services:
  - a. To collect, compile, and organise medical history.
  - b. Guide the child/young person and carer/s through the process of accessing health care.
  - c. Help schedule any specialty health care.
  - d. Support the establishment of continuity of health care.

*(Note: for First Nations children, this person should be from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background).*
2. Must ensure that all children and young people entering or involved with care and protection services have a comprehensive health assessment and health management plan *(Note: see the Australian National Clinical Assessment Framework)*.
  - These health management plans must be reviewed annually, or at least at significant milestones, by the healthcare navigator/coordinator.
  - The healthcare navigator/coordinator must ensure these health management plans are shared with the child's/young person's family/carers and healthcare team. *(Note: medical information should only be shared with the child/young person's family/carers where it is in the best interest of the child/young person's health, wellbeing and does not interfere with statutory orders in place).*
3. Must ensure health professionals providing health assessments and treatment of children and young people involved with care and protection services are adequately trained:
  - a. In trauma-informed assessment and care of children and young people and refer for appropriate and timely therapeutic interventions.
  - b. To recognise the uniqueness of each child/young person and avoid negative stereotyping.

- c. In issues surrounding identity, gender identity and sexual orientation to ensure care facilitates the wellbeing of the child/young person and provides a safe space for discussions.
  - d. To provide holistic health care that acknowledges child and family models of health needs and the importance of strengths-based holistic wellbeing conversations to support mental health.
  - e. To recognise the unique needs of children and young people from First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and provide culturally appropriate therapeutic services.
  - f. In substance use disorders and provide support to carer/s affected by these.
4. Must ensure that there are clear and defined processes for obtaining consent and maintaining privacy and confidentiality for children and young people involved with care and protection services.
  5. Must ensure health professionals are aware of local provisions for other assessments for children involved with care and protection services and advocate for children and young people to be referred to these, e.g. speech pathology, occupational therapy, dietetics, social work etc.
  6. Must ensure the voices of care-experienced children and young people, their carer/s are well represented in research examining their health and the impact of health care services.



## Care and protection service providers

The RACP recommends that care and protection service providers:

7. Must:
  - a. Be culturally safe and provide trauma-informed care.
  - b. Consider the need for relational, emotional, and mental health support for carer/s, alongside court processes, to support safe access and reunification.

- c. Ensure adequate supervision and specialist mental health support services are in place to support their care and protection workers.
8. Must ensure care and protection workers are adequately trained in:
  - a. Documentation that utilises appropriate language, and the way events are captured are sensitive and empathetic.
  - b. How to appropriately communicate and engage with children and young people, and extra care is taken to ensure privacy and confidentiality when communicating personal aspects of these children and young people.
  - c. Engaging the carer/s of the child or young person in the child's ongoing health planning where possible.
  - d. Supporting young people transitioning out of care to access free or low-cost health care.
  - e. Navigating the disability system.



## Both the Australian Government and State/Territory Governments

The RACP recommends that both the Australian and State/Territory Governments:

9. Must develop health and care and protection services with First Nations communities, supporting and investing in the strengths of First Nations peoples to lead on child wellbeing, development, and safety responses for First Nations children.
10. Must commit to and invest in prevention, early intervention, and support programs to reduce the number of children and carer/s involved with care and protection services and the risk of statutory intervention.
11. Must commit to and invest in First Nations community-led providers for comprehensive proactive support that address the needs of First Nations children and their carer/s.
12. Must appoint Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner roles in each jurisdiction.
  - The Commissioner's must review existing policies, programs and services in their jurisdiction to ensure the promotion and continued improvement of cultural safety and equity of access to health and care and protection services for First Nations children, young people and their carer/s.
13. Must invest in specialised multidisciplinary services for vulnerable children and young people to deliver integrated primary health, specialist, and mental

health care using the principles of integrated care, including through First Nations Organisations and community hubs.

14. Must commit to and invest in services in rural and regional areas and for families with mental health issues and substance use disorders, including pregnancy education and support.
15. Must implement a nationally consistent framework for young people leaving care up to the age of 21 years to ensure they have access to the health and services they need, including mental health outreach and substance use support programs.
16. Must commit to, and invest in, [Target 12](#) under [Closing the Gap](#), which aims to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.
17. Must provide adequate financial assistance and other supports to young people leaving care to meet their living and housing needs.



## The Australian Government

The RACP recommends that the Australian Government:

18. Must implement a nationally consistent and equal approach to payment and support services for both foster carers and kinship carers to support equitable access to health care and support services.
19. Must develop a framework that includes national health indicators to measure and evaluate interventions for the health and wellbeing of children and young people in the care and protection system, with annual reporting on these indicators to be undertaken by the Australian National Children's Commissioner.
20. Must develop a reporting framework that specifically addresses the health needs of First Nations children and young people involved with care and protection services. This information should be included in annual reports on child protection provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
21. Must develop specific Medicare item numbers for initial comprehensive and follow-up health assessments delivered by health care workers for children and young people in care and protection services.
22. Must commit to and invest in implementation of the National Clinical Assessment Framework in all jurisdictions to strengthen government responsibility and accountability for identifying the health needs of every child and young person involved with care and protection services, including those transitioning from care to independence.

- This should be co-designed with children, young people, carers and service providers with a special focus on the needs of multicultural communities and the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.
23. Must commit to and invest in full implementation of the [Safe and Supported National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-31](#).



## The State/Territory Governments

The RACP recommends that Australian State/Territory Governments:

24. Must implement a systems-approach to prioritise access to health care for children and young people involved with care and protection services.
25. Must explore and implement a single and easily transferable health care record system that can be shared with health professionals and those who care for the child/young person. This record system should interact with the Australian Government's My Health record system.
26. Must ensure mandatory reporting of Standard 5 of the [National Standards for OOHC](#) in their jurisdiction to address health inequity for children and young people involved with care and protection services.
27. Must undertake a training needs analysis to understand the current and potential gaps in care and protection service providers/workers knowledge and capability in recording of data and system usage. This should be used to inform development of jurisdiction training programs.
28. Must commit to and invest in adequate training programs and support services for foster carers and kinship carers.

