

Progress against past inquiries

This document provides an update on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's responses to our recommendations from *In our own words: Systemic inquiry into the lived experience of children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system* (2019) and the Commission's assessment of progress made in 2023-24.

The Commission will continue to annually assess and report on progress made against these recommendations.

In our own words

Systemic inquiry into the lived experience of children and young people in the Victorian out-of-home care system

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1a	<p>That, in line with <i>Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children</i>, the Victorian Government develop, resource and implement an integrated, whole-of-system investment model and strategy for the child and family system. The investment model should identify the resourcing levels needed for a safe and quality out-of-home care system by taking into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drivers of demand • key data and analysis relating to children and young people in the out-of-home care system • the need to reverse the increasing numbers of Aboriginal children and young people entering out-of-home care. 	In progress	In 2023–24, the department analysed drivers of demand for children and family services, and the implications for resourcing levels. This analysis will inform the development of the investment strategy and advice to government and external stakeholders about where to focus investment to deliver established reform priorities, achieve best value for money, and support the best possible outcomes for children and families experiencing vulnerability.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the further progress made against this recommendation.
1b	The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. Strategies to reduce demand should include targeted earlier intervention and prevention, prioritising the most vulnerable cohorts, including those with chronic and complex issues and children exposed to cumulative harm.	In progress	Refer to response for recommendation 1a.	Progress made	The Commission notes the further progress made against this recommendation.
1c	The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. Strategies to reduce demand should include a focus on Aboriginal children and young people.	In progress	Refer to response for recommendation 1a.	Significant progress made	The Commission notes the further progress made against this recommendation.

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1d	<p>The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. Strategies to reduce demand should include resources to work with children and young people in care and their families where reunification is in the child's best interests.</p>	Complete	<p>The department's development of models to forecast demand for children and family services, and the investment and workforce required to meet this demand, is designed to shift the system towards earlier intervention and diversionary responses for children and families in need.</p> <p>The 2024–25 State Budget provides \$198 million over two years to continue earlier intervention and diversion supports that keep families together and out of the statutory system. This includes funding for the Family Preservation and Reunification Response, Putting Families First and intensive services aimed at diverting families from statutory services. Importantly, this investment provides for critical evidence and implementation capability supports, necessary for the successful delivery of these services.</p> <p>In addition, the State Budget invests \$24 million over one year to continue support for Victorians with a disability, including services that enable families to access and effectively participate in the NDIS and other services, and to sustain care of the child in the family home.</p> <p>This builds on the government's \$49.47 million investment in 2023–24 over four years to expand early intervention supports for Aboriginal children and families.</p> <p>The department continues to seek additional investment in a range of earlier intervention programs through the annual State Budget cycle.</p>	Significant progress made	<p>The Commission commends the government on the investment in FPRR, Putting Families First and intensive family services, noting that there are still significant gaps in early intervention and supports for families with complex needs and that we look forward to government further addressing these gaps over time.</p>
1e	<p>The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. Strategies to reduce demand should include more suitable care placement options that are tailored to meet the needs of children and young people in care.</p>	In progress	<p>This recommendation is being considered as part of recommendation 1a.</p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	<p>The Commission notes the further progress made against this recommendation.</p>

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1f	Strategies to improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care should include more focus on placement planning to minimise placement changes.	In progress	As reported in Budget Paper 3, the 2023–24 expected outcome for the <i>percentage of children and young people in care who have had two or less placements in the past 12 months</i> is 93 per cent which is above the target set for the department of 90 per cent. The department also exceeded the target in 2022–23. The department is currently prioritising the delivery of other recommendations and government priorities, and work to further progress delivery of the updated Placement Planning Guidance is therefore paused at present.	Not progressed in current reporting year	
1g	The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. Strategies to reduce demand should include additional service supports to assist sibling groups to stay together or help them reunify while still in care, especially for larger groups of siblings in kinship care.	In progress	This recommendation is being considered as part of recommendation 1a.	Not progressed in current reporting year	
1h	The investment strategy should focus on maintaining safe and quality services in line with demand while also investing to reduce the number of children and young people entering care and improve outcomes. Strategies to reduce demand should include supports to help carers maintain placements, including during times of crisis or difficulty.	In progress	This recommendation is being considered as part of recommendation 1a.	Not progressed in current reporting year	

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1i	Strategies to improve outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care should include measures to ensure children and young people are provided with appropriate and supported opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that impact on them.	Complete	<p>The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered.</p> <p>The intent of this recommendation has been met through the implementation of the SAFER children framework in 2021 and subsequent updates to the Child Protection Manual to align with SAFER. SAFER places emphasis on the 'voice of the child' requiring the child's voice, views and wishes to be captured and included in planning and decision-making forums, such as case plan and care team meetings across all child protection phases.</p> <p>Tools to support the voice of the child including MY VIEWS were implemented electronically in November 2021.</p>	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission considers that while significant progress has been made in this area, practice change is still clearly needed. The Commission encourages the government to reintroduce the amendments in order to strengthen recognition of children's right to participate in decisions that affect them.
2	That the department explore how accountability and governance measures can be strengthened at a regional and local level to lift the quality and implementation of legislated processes to support connection to culture for Aboriginal children and young people in care.	In progress	The department is implementing the <i>Statement of Recognition Act 2023</i> , with work focusing on the 10 binding principles and legislative implementation of all five elements of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (ACPP) – both of which came into effect from 1 July 2024 and place additional requirements on decision makers to uphold cultural rights and sustain an Aboriginal child's connection to culture and Country. Through an Aboriginal Children's Forum action, the department and ACCOs are undertaking a redevelopment of cultural plans. Work is underway to redevelop the program by November 2024.	Significant progress made	The Commission welcomes the amendments to the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> and the work underway between the department and ACCOs to review and strengthen cultural plans.

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3	That the Victorian Government continue to support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination including through increased investment in community-led services and the gradual transfer of responsibility for the case management and case planning of Aboriginal children and young people in care to ACCOs.	In progress	<p>The 2023–24 State Budget provided \$140 million over four years to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children. This investment includes \$63.9 million over four years to grow the number of children in the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program by 756 Aboriginal children. In 2023–24 three new ACAC teams commenced and were allocated to an existing ACAC provider, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), in DFFH West, South and East Divisions. Furthermore, the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC) achieved full authorisation as an ACAC provider. Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative commenced pre-authorisation in 2023, bringing the total to two ACCOs in pre-authorisation with a process underway for a new ACCO to commence pre-authorisation in 2024–25. Self-determination underpins the ACAC program. Aboriginal people, who know what is best for Aboriginal children, should be responsible for the safety and protection of Aboriginal children.</p> <p>The Victorian Government is committed to increasing funding to ACCOs as a proportion of total Child Protection and Family Services programs funding and has increased investment from 11 per cent in 2016–17 to 16 per cent in 2023–24. Aboriginal people know the unique needs of their communities best and this funding will help Aboriginal-led organisations provide vital child protection services and support to keep families together.</p> <p>Australia's first statutory child protection investigation by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation occurred in October 2023 with the commencement of the Community Protecting Boorais program. Additional investment of \$13.7 million has been committed over three years from 2024–25 to continue and expand the Community Protecting Boorais program to enable up to 348 Aboriginal children to have their investigation managed by an Aboriginal agency, instead of the department. As an integrated and holistic approach towards self-determination, Wungurilwil Gappagduir shares several</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued next page</i></p>	Significant progress made	The Commission notes the funding provided in relation to this important work and the further work in train.

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3			<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <p>outcomes with other Aboriginal strategies across government. As such, Wungurilwil Gaggapduir has critical interdependencies with several Aboriginal strategies and relies significantly on investment and work across reforms to achieve outcomes. The Aboriginal Children's Forum is currently undertaking a refresh of the Wungurilwil Gaggapduir agreement to establish key priorities for further system transformation and alignment to state and national initiatives including Treaty, Safe and Supported, Yoorrook and Closing the Gap actions.</p>		
4c	That the department establish mechanisms to ensure that workers are allocated caseloads which allow them regular face-to-face contact with children and young people in order to build trust and rapport and to facilitate genuine opportunities for children and young people to participate in decision making about them.	In progress	The department has undertaken a review of the Child Protection Operating Model to contemporise the child protection program, which supports recruitment, retention and service delivery to children and their families. Implementation of the refreshed workforce domain is underway.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes this work, noting the further work that will be required to realise manageable caseloads for practitioners.
4d	That the department amend relevant program requirements and guidelines relating to the placement of children and young people in care to ensure that, unless exceptional circumstances exist, children and young people are informed about the proposed placement prior to the placement where possible, provided with the reason for any decision made by Child Protection or contracted agencies to place them in or remove them from a placement against their expressed wishes.	In progress	The department is currently prioritising the delivery of other recommendations and government priorities, and work to further progress delivery of this recommendation is therefore paused at present.	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission is disappointed that more than four years after the tabling of IOOW these guidelines are yet to be amended. The recommended change is critical to ensuring appropriate and respectful treatment of children in the care system.

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5a	That the department ensure that there is a single point of contact or key worker for all children and young people in care, with authority and access to resources to make day-to-day decisions related to implementing the child or young person's case plan and helping to navigate the system.	Complete	<p>The department is continuing to progress measures to address the vacancy rate in Child Protection, which will assist to improve case allocation rates and consistency of practitioner allocation.</p> <p>All children and young people involved with child protection are allocated to a team overseen by a team manager. The team manager makes all significant decisions in relation to the present and future care and well-being of the child, including facilitating access to funds where required. The objective remains that children are allocated a child protection practitioner by the team manager at the earliest opportunity. Where this is not possible, the team manager remains responsible until allocated a child protection practitioner. Work is underway to address the vacancy rate in Child Protection that will ultimately support improved case allocation rates and continuity in practitioners for children. The department is investing in a range of supply, retention and capability building initiatives. This includes attraction and recruitment activities and incentives, training and development opportunities, and wellbeing supports.</p> <p>Examples of targeted programs for recruitment of Child Protection practitioners include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child Protection Employment Program which provides social work students with paid on-the-job experience and creates a recruitment pipeline for Child Protection. The 2022–23 State Budget invested \$5.4 million over four years to continue this program. • The International Recruitment Strategy which supports qualified and experienced practitioners to relocate to Victoria. The 2022–23 State Budget committed a further \$800,000 over three years for this Strategy. • The successful 'Go Where You're Needed' local recruitment campaign which was relaunched in March 2023. <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued next page</i></p>	Progress made	The Commission notes the work that has been done to address the vacancy rate in Child Protection. This is an important step towards provision of key workers, but more is required to achieve the intent of this recommendation. One of the strongest themes from the 200+ children and young people we consulted for IOOW was that they need a single, stable worker to help them through their time in care. Data published in the <i>Let us learn</i> inquiry in November 2023 indicated that almost one in five children in care who are case managed by Child Protection have no allocated worker. The same report found that worker turnover, which results in children having many different workers over time, has become worse since IOOW.

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5a			<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <p>Broader recruitment campaigns include: the 'Jobs that Matter' campaign, Switch to Social Work program and Switch to Child Protection program.</p> <p>Additionally, the Victorian Government is investing \$1.2 million annually for the Child Protection Wellbeing Program to support the needs and wellbeing of Child Protection practitioners.</p> <p>Implementation of additional workforce measures will require additional investment and is subject to Government decisions through future budget processes.</p>		
6	<p>That the Victorian Government establish a specialised child and youth friendly complaints function to receive complaints from children and young people in care including complaints about their immediate or ongoing concerns about their safety and wellbeing while in care.</p>	In progress	<p>From 1 July 2024, the Commission has the ability to advocate for individual children and young people receiving care. The department notes that the Commission has raised the need for additional resourcing to support this function. In addition, on 1 February 2024 the Premier announced that a complaints division will be established within the Social Services Regulator to cover all regulated social services. This function is intended to complement and operate alongside the advocacy function operated by the Commission to enable children and young people to raise concerns about their care.</p>	Progress made	<p>While the legislative amendments enable the Commission to advocate for children and young people in care, the Victorian Government has provided no resources for this function. The Commission will continue to advocate for funding so that the legislative changes can result in meaningful assistance to and advocacy for children in care who need it.</p>

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7b	That the department revise the case planning template and advice to include the requirement for planned activity towards reuniting separated sibling groups in care or clearly state the rationale as to why this should not occur.	Complete	<p>Implementation of measures to address barriers to keeping sibling groups together while in care remain in progress.</p> <p>There are clear legislative and policy requirements in place that require work to be undertaken to reunify siblings when it is in their best interests to do so and as such, it is not considered necessary to update the case planning template.</p> <p>All decisions made about a child need to have regard for the principles set out in part 1.2 of the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> (CYFA). The CYFA stipulates that, when determining what decision or action to take in the best interests of the child, consideration must be given to a range of best-interests principles, including section 10(3)(q) the desirability of siblings being placed together when placed in out of home care. The department continues to work towards the prevention of separating siblings in the first instance, through a range of programs including the department's Family Response and Reunification program. This includes keeping children safely at home and preventing children and young people entering care services, or where children are in care, to safely reunify them with their family.</p> <p>Where siblings have been separated but it is in their best interests to reside together, reunification of siblings will remain an active goal in their respective case plans, supported by an active referral to locate a care arrangement for the siblings to reside together. For sibling groups that need to be placed in care, the choice of placement option is informed and managed in accordance with each child's and young person's individual case and care plan, which is based on an assessment of their specific risks and needs and their best interests. The Care Services Placement Support and Planning guidance highlights the need to prioritise the importance of the need for siblings to reside together. For Aboriginal children, consideration must be given to all five elements of the Aboriginal</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued next page</i></p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the continued work to address barriers to keeping sibling groups together and supporting siblings to remain connected.

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7b			<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <p>Child Placement Principle and the binding Statement of Recognition Principles. The Child Protection manual will continue to be reviewed and guidance strengthened to prevent the separation of siblings, and or support the reunification of siblings who may be separated when placed in care, where it is in their best interests to do so.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has invested through successive state budgets to improve the quality and mix of placement options available, including therapeutic and specialised models of care. This investment has strengthened placement options to cater for the varying needs and behaviours of children and young people, including to better enable siblings to be placed together in care.</p> <p>Implementation of additional therapeutic and specialist supports, and care placement capacity, will require additional investment and is subject to Government decisions through future budget processes.</p>		
7c	That the department review the adequacy of contact supports for children and young people in care with a disability, including a developmental delay or intellectual disability.	In progress	The draft practice advice is currently being consulted on, including with Disability Practice Advisors. Once this occurs, the practice advice will, subject to final approvals, be included within the Child Protection Manual.	Progress made	The Commission notes the further work underway on the practice advice and looks forward to its inclusion in the manual.

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7e	That the department review the effectiveness of the current carer authorisation policy to maximise the participation of children and young people in care in activities in their community.	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>To complete the recommendation, further work is required in relation to carer authorisation in the context of residential care and kinship care.</p> <p>In relation to foster carers, the department considers that this recommendation has been addressed. Standard authorisations are in place that enable carers to support children in their care to undertake a range of day to day activities.</p> <p>In relation to residential care, the recommendation is being progressed as part of <i>Out of sight</i> recommendation 2.3.</p> <p>In relation to kinship carers, the Child Protection Manual provides guidance around Child Protection and carer roles/responsibilities in relation to authorisations. The Manual provides for these decisions to be informed by the individual circumstances of the child/young person, the carer, and the parent noting it can differ based on court orders and parental guardianship rights and responsibilities. The department will consider whether this can be further streamlined.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the progress made and looks forward to seeing the new program requirements for young people in residential care.

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7f	That the department review the adequacy of the current budget allocation to support children and young people in all forms of care to engage in activities both inside and outside of their homes.	Complete	<p>The department considers this recommendation complete.</p> <p>The Victorian Government provides a range of financial supports for carers and children and young people in their care (separate to funding also available through the Commonwealth). The Victorian Government funds care allowance across five levels, with higher level payments available for children/young people with higher needs/complexity, client expenses that can supplement care allowance, brokerage for specific supports (like education, health) as well as targeted care packages to stabilise placements. These funding sources all support children and young people to engage in activities both inside and outside their homes, and are informed by each child's case and care plan, which is managed and supported by the care team.</p> <p>Funding is also available to carers and other families through the education portfolio to assist with schooling and extracurricular costs. For example, the Camps, Sports and Excursions fund provides payments for eligible students to attend school camps, excursions, and sports and outdoor education programs. The Victorian Government also funds State Schools Relief to assist families in need with free or discounted new school uniforms, school shoes and textbooks.</p> <p>The department notes that this can be a complex landscape for children/carers and proposes to develop fact sheets to provide information to carers on supports available and how to access them. This will be done in collaboration with the Department of Education in relation to supports available for school-related costs.</p>	Completed	The Commission notes the department has reviewed financial supports available to assist children and young people in care. The Commission is disappointed that the Government has not increased the budget allocation for financial supports, given a number of the Commission's inquiries have found current levels of support to be inadequate. The Commission will continue to advocate to the government for increases.

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
9	<p>That, in addition to First Supports, provided to families in the first 12 months of the placement, the department develop measures as part of the <i>Strong carers, stronger children</i> strategy to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all kinship placements continue to receive supports after this timeframe where required • the risk of placement breakdown is identified early so that resources can be allocated appropriately. 	Complete	<p>The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered.</p> <p>A range of measures remain available to kinship carers beyond the first 12 months of care. Carers continue to receive financial and practical supports including care allowance, client funding, and carer training. Kinship carers also continue to receive additional supports to prevent placement breakdown and to stabilise placements. This includes support offered through Kinship Engagement Teams, Care Support Help Desk and flexible funding and support via targeted care packages.</p> <p>The Care Support Helpdesk received ongoing funding as part of the 2024–25 State Budget released on 7 May 2024.</p>	Completed	The Commission notes and welcomes the ongoing funding of the Carer Support Help Desk as part of the 2024–25 State Budget.

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10	<p>That the department provide clear guidance to Child Protection, CSO and ACCO workers with case management responsibility so that when they have face-to-face contact with children and young people in care, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ask about their safety not in the presence of their carers provide them with a clear way of contacting their worker if they do have concerns about their safety. 	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The SAFER Framework, implemented in November 2021, actively encourages the voice of the child being included in the case planning process and during client visits ensuring visibility of the child, their voice, views and wishes are part of the risk assessment process and their rights are considered as paramount.</p> <p>Current advice on the Child Protection Manual provides clear guidance to seeking the views of the child and to providing the child with contact information for the allocated Child Protection practitioner.</p> <p>Further, current advice states that engagement of a child is extremely important in order to obtain information to assess children's safety. Interviewing children is central to assessing the level of risk and ensuring their safety and development. Interviewing a child face to face without a supportive adult should occur if it is in the child's best interests to proceed in this manner.</p> <p>To deliver on the intent of the recommendation, the department will progress further work to consider strengthening practice advice that, when planning interviews with children in out of home care, consideration should be given to asking children about their safety and not in the presence of their carers/parents, where this is appropriate and in the child's best interests.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes the progress made. Action is still required to provide guidance about interviewing children without their carers present. IOOW found this was critical to ensure children can raise safety or other concerns about their placement.
11	<p>That the department, as part of its work to improve placement matching, develop and implement guidelines which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> prohibit the placement of children aged under 12 years with older children or young people unless the older child is a sibling and it is in the best interests of the child provide guidance to improve decisions about the co-placement of children and young people with complex needs. 	In progress	<p>The department is currently prioritising the delivery of other recommendations and government priorities, and work to further progress delivery of the updated Placement Planning Guidance is on hold. In the meantime, the department has improved oversight through a shift to consolidated oversight and delivery of the Care Services system at a divisional level and the development of an oversight tool that enables real time monitoring of residential care placements across the state.</p>	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission notes efforts to strengthen oversight of residential care placements. The recommended actions are yet to be actioned and, in the Commission's view, remain important.

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12	<p>That the department ensure that any interagency protocol to reduce the contact of children and young people in residential care with police and the criminal justice system is developed and monitored in consultation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people with an experience of residential care • a representative Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation • the Commission. <p>The implementation of this protocol should be supported by additional training and support for residential care workers in responding to and working with children and young people affected by trauma. This training and support should emphasise the need for consistency and predictability.</p>	Complete	<p>The department considers this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>The <i>Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care</i> was finalised in 2020. Signatories include Victoria Police and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. The Framework's development was supported by a range of stakeholders, including young people with lived experience.</p> <p>The Framework, and its 18-month action plan are being monitored in line with the Monitoring and Implementation Plan, supported by improved reporting about young people's contact with Victoria Police. Oversight is through the Statewide Implementation Group, which includes the Framework signatories and other stakeholders such as Victoria Legal Aid.</p> <p>Implementation includes new training and resources for residential care workers through the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy.</p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the work completed on this recommendation, noting that significant further effort is required to implement the framework and associated action plan so that it has some effect in reducing children's contact with the criminal justice system.
13	<p>That the department, in consultation with children and young people with an experience of residential care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop guidelines about what a home-like residential care environment looks and feels like • conduct rigorous assessments of residential care drawing on these guidelines • ensure these assessments include speaking to children and young people within these units about their views on the extent to which the physical living environment feels like a 'home'. 	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The department has engaged Monash University, Institute for Safety, Compensation and Research Recovery, to support the development of design guidelines. Monash has undertaken a literature review, considered best practice approaches and undertaken consultations with stakeholders including young people with lived experience. Monash will deliver its report in the second half of 2024.</p>	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to seeing the Monash report and consequent action on this recommendation.
14	<p>That the department:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop guidelines for contracted agencies to help them determine when it is in the best interests of a child or young person in care to have access to a companion animal • support programs or initiatives which utilise a companion or therapy animal. 	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>It will be implemented as part of the refresh of residential care program requirements, being undertaken as part of the project to implement the 2023–24 investment to enable access to therapeutic supports for all young people in residential care by 2025–26.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes and welcomes the progress that has been made in relation to this recommendation.

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15b	That the Victorian Government ensure that appropriate supports are provided to deal with trauma, including all contracted agency staff should be required to undertake training in regard to trauma-informed care.	In progress	The department has developed and published the Framework for Trauma-informed Practice (TIP) in early 2023 for the child and family services sector, including care service providers. In relation to residential care workers, expectations are outlined in the Residential Care program requirements. This includes trauma-related training as part of the minimum qualification requirements, offered as part of the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy (delivered by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare), as well as through provider-specific induction and training. In relation to home-based care workers, expectations are outlined in the Home-based Care (HBC) program requirements and includes that providers are to deliver training that ensure workers are competent to meet the specific needs of children in care including challenging behaviours and a therapeutic approach to care. The department is intending to update the HBC program requirements, and will consider opportunities to strengthen them in line with this recommendation. This work has been paused while the department focuses on more priority reforms in home-based care, including through the HBC Collaborative Working Group focused on broad system reform to better attract, retain and support home-based carers.	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission notes that this work has been paused to focus on other reforms.
15c	That the Victorian Government ensure that appropriate supports are provided to deal with trauma, including learning and development for Child Protection staff that provides regular updates on evidence-based approaches to children and young people living with trauma.	In progress	The new Child Protection Practice Induction Program commenced on 28 May 2024.	Significant progress made	The Commission notes the progress on this recommendation and looks forward to the completion of the induction rollout and the provision of ongoing learning and development.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16a	<p>That the Victorian Government create and fund a suite of therapeutic options for children and young people in care which support children and young people with complex trauma and challenging behaviours to transition over time to more family-like care environments including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a model of care, support and accommodation tailored to the child or young person's individual needs with continued transition support to facilitate them moving into home-based care. 	Complete	<p>The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered, with further investment a matter for government budget decisions.</p> <p>Any expansion of current models of care would require additional investment and is therefore subject to Victorian Government decisions as part of future budget processes.</p> <p>Supported by significant Victorian Government investment through successive State Budgets, Victoria's care services system provides an established suite of care placement options, including therapeutic and specialised models of care, to cater for the varying needs and behaviours of children and young people in care. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship care: Victoria's new kinship care model, introduced in 2018, with First Supports and care teams delivering increased assistance to carers and children and young people. • Foster care: A range of foster care placement options, with three funding levels for standard foster care placements to cater for varying levels of need, and therapeutic (The Circle Program) and professional (Treatment Foster Care Oregon) options catering for those children and young people with more complex needs and behaviours. • Residential Care: A shift to a therapeutic model of residential care, with investment to ensure all children and young people in residential care have access to therapeutic supports by 2025–26, and the establishment of new two- and three-bed residential care homes to provide smaller homes and more dedicated, specialised support. • Targeted Care Packages, which provide flexible funding to deliver additional therapeutic and other supports to children and young people in home-based care placement, to cater to higher needs and prevent entry into (or facilitate exit from) residential care. <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued next page</i></p>	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	Without appropriate, stable, tailored and therapeutic care options to meet the needs of all children who cannot be placed in home-based care, this recommendation cannot be considered complete. The Commission notes and has welcomed the significant investment by the Victorian Government in successive budgets to introduce some two- and three-bedroom homes with additional intensive supports, and to provide for a base level of therapeutic funding in all residential care by 2025–26. Unfortunately, as at June 2024, our inquiries and incident reviews make it clear that many children in residential are not receiving the tailored and trauma informed care they need and deserve; ongoing work is required.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16a			<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <p>*Care Hub, which provides new entrants in care with early assessment and wrap around supports including therapeutic, mental health and AOD supports to support family reunification and/or permanency. This received ongoing funding from the 2025–26 State Budget.</p> <p>The choice of placement option is informed and managed in accordance with each child's and young person's individual case and care plan, which is based on an assessment of their specific risks and needs.</p>		
16b	That the Victorian Government create and fund a suite of therapeutic options for children and young people in care which support children and young people with complex trauma and challenging behaviours to transition over time to more family-like care environments including more flexible placement options, including two bed or single bed placements with tailored and appropriately skilled staff (not through current contingency arrangements).	Complete	Refer to response for recommendation 16a.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	As above
16c	That the Victorian Government create and fund a suite of therapeutic options for children and young people in care which support children and young people with complex trauma and challenging behaviours to transition over time to more family-like care environments including a form of professionalised foster care.	Complete	Refer to response for recommendation 16a.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	As above

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16d	That the Victorian Government increase funding and availability of therapeutic placement prevention and reunification supports for children and young people in or at risk of entering out-of-home care.	Complete	<p>The 2024–25 State Budget continues funding for a range of therapeutic placement prevention and reunification supports that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$198 million over two years to continue earlier intervention and diversion supports that keep families together and out of the statutory system. This includes funding for the Family Preservation and Reunification Response, Putting Families First and intensive services aimed at diverting families from statutory services. Importantly, this investment provides for critical evidence and implementation capability supports, necessary for the successful delivery of these services • continued funding for the Care Hub. <p>These programs form part of a suite of earlier intervention and diversionary services that operate across a continuum, ranging from families with emerging needs to those experiencing more complex problems, including where children are in care, with the aim of keeping families safe, well and connected, and preventing escalation into the statutory system.</p> <p>The department continues to seek additional investment in a range of earlier intervention programs, therapeutic placement prevention and reunification supports, through the annual State Budget cycle.</p>	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the significant progress and investment in this area. However, the number of children in care is not yet reducing, suggesting that these important new measures may need to be available to a greater number of families.
16e	That the department develop the expertise, focus and capacity of Child Protection workers to assist families to achieve reunification, including case planning.	In progress	A new Child Protection Practice Induction Program commenced on 28 May 2024.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the progress on this recommendation, looks forward to the implementation of the new Child Protection Practice Induction Program and will request updated information on reunification rates to assess improvements over time.

Progress against past inquiries: *In our own words*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
17	<p>That the Victorian Government develop mechanisms to track and report on outcomes for children in out-of-home care to ensure that care services, policy and programs are focused on improved outcomes for children and young people in care. This should include the development of key indicators, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of placement changes children and young people experience • drivers and characteristics of placement breakdown • frequency of contact with siblings and family members • number of siblings living separately from one or more of their siblings in care • successful reunification of children with their family • timeliness of kinship care assessments • funded agency workforce capacity and training • contact between children and young people and their workers • number of complaints received from children and young people in care disaggregated by age and care type. <p>An appropriate internal governance body should be established to monitor and track these indicators and ensure that the data collected can inform implementation and sequencing of reform initiatives.</p> <p>The internal governance body should provide regular updates to the Commission on these indicators and on the impact of reform initiatives on the indicators.</p>	In progress	<p>A Kinship Assessment interactive data tool was launched in January 2024. The tool monitors daily compliance and timeliness of kinship assessments (parts A, B and C) and facilitates monthly reporting.</p> <p>Complaints/feedback data is available by age and care type (noting that the number of young people who submit complaints is low). Young people do not actively engage with formal feedback processes and tend to instead engage via case management processes, residential care staff, carers and other practitioners/advocacy parties. A systemic review of feedback identified improvement opportunities relating to capability, technology, governance, and priority of client voice data – implementation is underway.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes progress against this recommendation.