

Progress against past inquiries

This document provides an update on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's responses to our recommendations from *Out of sight: Systemic inquiry into children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care* 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.

Out of sight

Systemic inquiry into children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care

Progress against past inquiries: *Out of sight*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	<p>That the department lead cultural change to challenge the continuing perception among some stakeholders, including departmental staff, residential care staff and police, that children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care are less at risk or less deserving of a timely, care-based response than other children and young people, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • removing references to the term absconding from all relevant policies, procedures, guidelines and training modules • including further guidance in policy, procedures and training on the reasons children and young people leave residential care, the risks they face and the harm they may suffer, the language used to describe this behaviour • supporting improved understanding across other agencies, including Victoria Police, of the reasons children and young people leave care, the risks they face and the harm they may suffer. 	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>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. The department has also shared this with partners, such as Victoria Police, to consider in their guidance and training. The department has also reviewed its Child Protection Manual and Beginning Practice resources regarding Missing Children and Young People to remove references to ‘absconding’. The department, together with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and Victoria Police, are delivering forums to Child Protection, residential care and Victoria Police workforces on guidance and collaborative practice on responding to young people at risk of CSE (including reasons, risks and harms when missing/absent from care). These forums are occurring through 2024.</p> <p>To complete this recommendation, further work is required to update the residential care program requirements (proposed to be undertaken as part of recommendation 2) to provide further guidance. This includes incorporating the Trauma-Informed Practice Framework.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the progress made and would welcome further efforts, as well as an assessment of changes in attitudes and responses.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
2.1	<p>That, when funding and implementing the new model of care recommended in the Commission's 2019 <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, the Victorian Government ensure the following elements are delivered to address the specific needs of children and young people who become absent or missing from residential care.</p> <p>That the new model of residential care include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a strong focus on developing trusted relationships with carers and key workers • a consistent care experience provided by carers and across houses and service providers founded on care and concern, not punitive responses • an emphasis on personal skill development, including the capacity to assess and manage risks, particularly those associated with sexual harm • embedded services, including services for treatment of mental ill health and dependence on alcohol and other substances • adequate resources and timely approval processes for children and young people to engage in activities • clear integration of therapeutic support in case and care planning. 	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The government, as part of the 2023–24 State Budget has invested in therapeutic supports for all young people in residential care by 2025–26. The department has commenced work to implement this, including through the development of interim guidelines to set expectations around the role of the therapeutic specialist supporting young people and staff.</p> <p>Further work is required to complete this recommendation and will be undertaken through the development of a consolidated program of requirements for therapeutic residential care.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the development of interim guidelines but is disappointed that some aspects of this recommendation, such as embedding support services into a therapeutic model of care, will not be progressed at this time.
2.2	<p>That, when funding and implementing the new model of care recommended in the Commission's 2019 <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, the Victorian Government ensure the following elements are delivered to address the specific needs of children and young people who become absent or missing from residential care.</p> <p>That increased effort and investment be deployed to foster children and young people's connections to family, friends and community, as part of and where possible prior to their transition to residential care settings</p>	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The government, as part of the 2023–24 State Budget has invested in therapeutic supports for all young people in residential care by 2025–26. The department has commenced work to implement this, including through the development of interim guidelines to set expectations around the role of the therapeutic specialist supporting young people and staff.</p> <p>Further work is required to complete this recommendation and will be undertaken through the development of a consolidated program of requirements for therapeutic residential care.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the progress made and looks forward to seeing the new program requirements.

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2.3	<p>That, when funding and implementing the new model of care recommended in the Commission's 2019 <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, the Victorian Government ensure the following elements are delivered to address the specific needs of children and young people who become absent or missing from residential care.</p> <p>That authorisation policies for contact with family and friends, and participation in activities in the community, be reviewed to ensure timely decision-making and support to effectively manage and mitigate risk.</p>	In progress	The government, as part of the 2023–24 State Budget has invested in therapeutic supports for all young people in residential care by 2025–26. The department has commenced work to implement this, including through the development of interim guidelines to set expectations around the role of the therapeutic specialist supporting young people and staff.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the progress made and looks forward to seeing the new program requirements.
2.4	That ongoing and additional effort and investment be deployed to support connection to culture, paying particular attention to the causes of, and potential consequences for, Aboriginal children and young people going absent or missing from residential care, including the potential for cultural harm.	In progress	The department has continued to increase focus on cultural plan compliance, making brokerage available to support cultural plan development and implementation, and continues to expand the transfer of case planning responsibility to ACCOs through ACAC. The department has recently updated the cultural plan brokerage funding guidelines through consultation with ACCO's and across the relevant department areas to enable the implementation of cultural plans, including return to Country and supporting children whose mob is from interstate. The department has set a compliance improvement target for each area, which is currently in progress. At the recent ACF meeting it was decided a new model of cultural planning be developed and work is underway to redevelop the program.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the updated guidance and additional brokerage to support this work

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
2.5	<p>That, when funding and implementing the new model of care recommended in the Commission's 2019 <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, the Victorian Government ensure the following elements are delivered to address the specific needs of children and young people who become absent or missing from residential care.</p> <p>That the department invest in improving the skills, processes and supervision of care teams for children and young people in residential care. Improvements should be implemented through updated guidelines, policies and training. Care teams should be supported by agendas, action items, and clear role allocation and communication channels. The department should encourage a culture where care team members are empowered to seek senior engagement and active supervision when needed.</p>	In progress	Further work is required to complete this recommendation and will be undertaken through the development of a consolidated program of requirements for therapeutic residential care.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the progress made and looks forward to seeing the new program requirements.
3.1	<p>That, when funding and implementing the new model of care recommended in <i>In our own words</i>, the Victorian Government ensure the following additional elements are delivered to reduce the number of children and young people who become absent or missing from residential care.</p> <p>That, when a child or young person is absent or missing from residential care for a prolonged period, their residential care placement should not be reallocated to another child or young person unless there are concerns that the specific placement itself is contributing to the child or young person being absent or missing.</p>	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 notes the lack of progress on this recommendation since last year.
3.2	That the department develop and implement clear guidelines for planning to support children and young people prior to and immediately after entering residential care and moving between residential care houses. For emergency placements, the department should implement additional supports, and consider provision of temporary accommodation while assessments are conducted and an appropriate placement is found.	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 notes the lack of progress on this recommendation since last year.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
3.3	That a multi-agency panel approach to planning, with clear allocation of responsibilities between agencies, be implemented for all children and young people who go absent or missing from residential care. The multi-agency panel approach should be founded on a common understanding of the child or young person's vulnerabilities, the nature and level of risks the child or young person faces when absent or missing from care, and agreed expectations regarding the response when the child or young person is absent or missing.	Complete	The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered. Child Protection has updated the practice guidance to clarify roles and responsibilities. Specific reference to the care team contributing to safety and behaviour planning has been updated. The established mechanisms, such as the repeat missing person's template and behaviour support plan, facilitate information sharing and support a coordinated response for all agencies involved in the child or young person's case.	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission is concerned that no meaningful changes have been implemented to the use of the High Risk Youth schedule and panel for children who are absent from placement. Since this inquiry, the Commission has continued to identify instances of children experiencing serious harm when absent from care where there has been no multi-agency coordination or coordination has been ineffective.
3.4	That the department review planning tools (including draft connection planning tools) to clarify how planning tools align, which tools are optional, when they should be updated and who they should be shared with. Integration of planning tools should be supported by a visual map to guide practitioners and care teams. Development of new planning tools should be integrated into existing processes to avoid duplication and additional administrative burden.	In progress	This recommendation remains in progress. To deliver on the intent of this recommendation, the department has undertaken a review of all policies, advice and procedures in the Child Protection Manual regarding missing children and has drafted updates to provide clear guidance to Child Protection and alignment across advice. Final stakeholder engagement, including with Victoria Police, is underway with a view to the updates being published in the Child Protection Manual in 2024, which will complete this recommendation.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the work underway to review policies, advice and procedures in the Child Protection Manual and looks forward to reviewing them once completed.
5	That the Victorian Government fund, reinstate and expand the Child Sexual Exploitation Enhanced Response Model across the state, including the provision of additional resources if needed. The expansion should be supported by clear leadership and governance mechanisms.	Propose to retire	DFFH's response to child sexual exploitation is undergoing significant enhancement as a result of State Budget investment, and implementation will have several phases. This includes an expansion of the practice response with additional Sexual Exploitation Practice Leaders to give statewide coverage, and two new positions in the After-hours program. Recruitment is underway for a significant expansion of the central team to support divisions with additional risk and analytical capability. This will be supported by the development of a joint strategy with Victoria Police to culminate in an enhanced intelligence sharing model and response through a streamlined operational model.	Progress made	The Commission stresses the need for urgent progress in this area, particularly given what we have seen in our inquiries this year. The Commission will keep this recommendation open until the new Child Sexual Exploitation strategy is in place.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
6	That the department and key stakeholders including Victoria Police work to improve understanding of child criminal exploitation and develop a specialist response across the state, like the Child Sexual Exploitation Enhanced Response Model. The specialist response should include awareness raising through new guidelines, policies and training, combined with intensive interventions and support for children and young people in residential care who are at risk of child criminal exploitation. The model should be supported by clear leadership and governance mechanisms, and additional resources if needed.	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>Please note 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.</p> <p>Significant work on other, related actions to address criminalisation of young people in residential care is underway and will provide a foundation from which to progress this recommendation. The department, alongside signatory partners, has continued to progress implementation of the 18-month action plan. This is supported by local area multi-agency partnerships to respond to issues impacting on criminalisation and provide a forum for local decision-making, new reporting into residential care homes in relation to contact with police and new and updated training and resources for residential care workers.</p>	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission notes that work on this recommendation has paused and the ongoing urgency to progress work in relation to this recommendation.
7	That the Victorian Government fund the roll-out of the MacKillop Family Services Power to kids: respecting sexual safety program to all residential care houses in Victoria.	Complete	<p>The department considers that this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>Mackillop Family Services are rolling out Power to Kids, and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is working with them in relation to promotion and alignment with other training offered through the Residential Care Learning and Development Strategy.</p>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission commends McKillop for securing philanthropic funding to support other agencies to use this approach. The Commission is disappointed that the department was not prepared to ensure this evidence-based approach was implemented across all residential care agencies as a part of the suite of measures needed to reduce sexual abuse and exploitation of children in care.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
8.1	<p>That the department ensure that consistent, concise and current information is collected about individual children and young people at risk of going absent or missing from residential care. The collection systems should ensure that key information about the child or young person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is easily identifiable and accessible by child protection and residential care staff • is up-to-date and accurate • can be shared swiftly with other agencies, such as Victoria Police, when required. 	Complete	<p>The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered.</p> <p>When a child is missing from residential care, information about the child is recorded on their Client Relationship Information System file. This will include information about any risks to the child that are specific to their individual circumstances, meeting notes and any risk assessments that are completed by the child's Child Protection practitioner.</p> <p>The electronic Child Protection Manual provides guidance for Child Protection practitioners and contracted case managers on how to identify when a child or young person is at risk of going missing, and how each episode of missing should be assessed and responded to.</p> <p>In addition, the department has implemented changes to the Client Incident Management System incident reports, making them available against a child's record in the Client Relationship Information System (since July 2021), so information is easily accessible for Child Protection and sharing with relevant agency staff and Victoria Police.</p> <p>Collaborative work between the department and Victoria Police to enhance systems level information sharing, rather than real time, is continuing under the oversight of the Vulnerable Children's Committee.</p>	Not progressed in current reporting year	Based on the department's update, the only action taken to implement this recommendation has been to make incident reports more readily visible in a child's CRIS file. Unfortunately, incident reporting continues to be ad hoc with significant underreporting of children missing from care. This means reliance on incident reports as a source of clear, concise information about a child will be ineffective.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
8.2	<p>That the department develop a missing child checklist to ensure swift and comprehensive sharing of key information with other agencies if a child or young person is absent or missing from residential care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The checklist should include additional information similar to that contained in the Community Around the Child initiative's profile on a page for each child or young person at risk of going absent or missing from residential care to support police and other key agencies to respond in a trauma-informed way. • This information should align with the child or young person's behaviour support plan. • The checklist should be pre-populated, reviewed and shared regularly. • The department should ensure there are checks in place to guarantee that these checklists are completed, easily accessible and up-to-date. 	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>To deliver on the intent of this recommendation, the department has reviewed and strengthened both the 'repeat missing persons' and 'behaviour support plan' templates. The department has consulted with internal DFFH stakeholders and Victoria Police to prepare the updated guidance. The updated guidance is in the final review phase and is expected to be finalised in June 2024. It is anticipated the updated guidance will be published in the Child Protection manual in 2024.</p> <p>Collaborative work between the department and Victoria Police to enhance systems level information sharing, rather than real time, is continuing under the oversight of the Vulnerable Children's Committee.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes the progress made and looks forward to seeing the finalised guidance and templates.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
9	<p>That the department work with residential care service providers and Victoria Police to develop a common risk-based assessment framework to guide agencies response when a child or young person is absent or missing from residential care. This framework should incorporate an assessment of a child or young person’s vulnerability informed by known or suspected risk factors such as exposure to sexual or criminal exploitation, substance use, disability, medical conditions and age.</p> <p>The risk assessment framework should inform response planning in the event the child or young person goes absent or missing. Planning should clearly articulate when to escalate the response by seeking police intervention and which tools to employ, such as a missing person report or warrant.</p> <p>If a missing person report is made, escalation of the investigation to specialist police units such as the Criminal Investigation Unit or SOCITs should be based on an assessment of risk, rather than a standard period of time from the date of the report.</p> <p>The terms missing or absent should not determine the level of risk and corresponding response required.</p> <p>Risk assessment guidelines should clarify that, even if child protection or residential care staff suspect they know where a child or young person is likely to be, this does not mean that the child or young person is at less risk. If a child or young person’s location is known (not merely suspected), alternatives to a missing person report should be considered, such as attendance of a rover or other outreach service.</p>	In progress	<p>The SAFER children framework is the risk assessment approach that is used by DFFH. It is currently being evaluated. DFFH is ensuring the evaluation (and literature review) includes consideration of how it can be strengthened in assessing risk related to a child or young person absent or missing from residential care, and child sexual exploitation. Additionally, DFFH is now leading implementation of an enhanced response to child sexual exploitation in partnership with residential care providers and Victoria Police which will include strengthening contemporary practice responses to children who go missing from care and are at higher risk of being sexually exploited in the community.</p>	Progress made	<p>The Commission notes the progress on the SAFER evaluation and associated plan to strengthen assessments of risk related to children or young people absent or missing from care. The Commission has previously highlighted the need for a cross-agency risk assessment and framework that can be used by Victoria Police, care providers and Child Protection to guide responses to children and young people who are absent from placement. The Commission reiterates that this is a necessary component to improve consistency of response when children are absent from placement, strengthen responses to support children’s safety and reduce unnecessary police involvement. While welcome, it is not clear how the implementation of an enhanced response to child sexual exploitation will achieve these outcomes for children who are absent from care.</p>

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
10	<p>That the department review policies, procedures, training and service expectations to ensure that, when a child or young person is absent or missing from residential care, child protection and residential care staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consistently apply a strengths-based response to express care and concern when contacting the child or young person do not respond in a way that is punitive, criminalising, threatening or that otherwise suggests a lack of care for the child or young person's safety and wellbeing. 	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The recommendation will be considered as part of the work underway to consolidate and develop a program of requirements for therapeutic residential care, being developed 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 welcomes the work to progress therapeutic residential care.
11.1	<p>Unnecessary and harmful police intervention and contact with children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care must be reduced to a minimum.</p> <p>That the department ensure risk-based response planning for the use of missing person reports and warrants is integrated into a broader relationship-based strategy founded on care and concern to support children and young people to remain in their residential care placement and to safeguard them when they are absent or missing from care.</p>	Complete	<p>The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered.</p> <p>The department, alongside signatory partners, has continued to progress implementation of the 18-month action plan for the Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care (Framework). This is supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> local area multi-agency partnerships to respond to issues impacting on criminalisation and provide a forum for local decision-making new reporting into residential care homes in relation to contact with police and new, and updated training and resources for residential care workers. <p>Action 5 of the 18-month action plan relates to integrating the Framework into guidance for Victoria Police. This has been completed, with the Framework principles having been incorporated into the draft Child and Youth Strategy and Child Cautioning Practice Guide. Work has also been undertaken to incorporate principles into relevant Victoria Police Manual entries.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes that there is no common risk-assessment framework for children who are absent or missing from placement, and there has been no action taken to systematically change the use of police, or police responses, when children are missing from care.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
11.2	That the Victorian Government ensure availability of properly resourced, viable alternative options to police intervention when a child or young person is absent or missing from care and is located. In particular, residential care rover services should be resourced to assist in locating, transporting and supporting children or young people who are absent or missing from care. Rover services should work collaboratively with local police to minimise police contact with children and young people in residential care.	Complete	<p>The department considers that this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>The government has funded rover services in the new two and three bed therapeutic homes. In all other residential care homes, the Overnight Safety Plan provides a rapid response of additional staff overnight and strategies to support the safe return of young people to their home, using alternatives to police intervention such as rovers, outreach or other services as needed.</p> <p>The department's After Hours Street Works Service also operates to support this work, now known as the Young People's Outreach Team. This service provides targeted identification, follow up, outreach and intervention for young people at risk and works collaboratively with care teams, care providers, including ACAC providers, and relevant after hours services to inform the most appropriate interventions to minimise risk of harm.</p> <p>In addition, the 2023–24 State Budget outcome provides for therapeutic supports in all homes which will provide better placement support to reduce drivers of missing/absence incidents, and greater clarity on staffing expectations within homes.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes and has welcomed the increased funding to enable all residential care providers to provide some level of therapeutic care. The department advises this funding will be accompanied by stronger requirements for providers to ensure viable alternative options to police intervention when children are absent from care, whether through additional staffing levels or use of rover services. The Commission looks forward to seeing a reduced call on police to return children to placement.
11.3	That the department incorporate access to viable alternative options to police intervention and contact when children and young people are missing from residential care into the action plan for the implementation of the Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care as a priority in 2021.	Complete	See response to rec 11.2	Progress made	

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12	<p>That the Victorian Government replace the term warrant in section 598 of the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> (Vic) with an alternative term that is not associated with the criminal justice process.</p> <p>The new term should convey that the response is care-based and not criminal.</p> <p>The department should work with key stakeholders, including residential care service providers and Victoria Police, to implement updated guidance and training for staff to promote the adoption of the change in terminology, including training on the reasons for the change.</p>	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress, noting implementation is subject to government decision-making and Parliamentary processes.</p> <p>The <i>Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill 2021</i> lapsed at the conclusion of the 59th Parliament. Consideration will be given to opportunities to progress further legislative reform, including key elements of the lapsed Bill, during this term of government.</p>	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission notes the lack of progress since last year and urges the Victorian Government to progress this amendment, which is an important part of culture change in relation to children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
13	<p>That the department work with key stakeholders, including police, residential care service providers and the Children’s Court, to streamline processes and clarify definitions and roles concerning missing person reports and warrants (however renamed, as recommended above) for children and young people in residential care. In particular, the department should work with key stakeholders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarify that if a child or young person’s location is known (not just suspected), they are not missing so a missing person report is not required (noting that police intervention or support may nevertheless be needed) • ensure that a missing person report can be made as soon as a child or young person goes missing, rather than waiting 24 hours prior to making a report • ensure that there is no need for a missing person report to be made prior to applying for a warrant, or vice versa, as is currently the case • remove the requirement that a missing person report be made to police in person, making it possible for residential care staff or child protection staff to make a missing person report by telephone • streamline processes for providing police with information for missing person reports and warrants, using checklists and pre-populated forms • require that if police sight a child or young person who is subject to a missing person report, police notify and consult with residential care staff or child protection staff prior to closing the missing person investigation • standardise information in affidavits in support of warrant applications, for example using templates, and include all relevant, up-to-date information • facilitate the procedure for filing warrant applications through electronic processes where possible <p><i>continued next page</i></p>	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>To deliver on the intent of this recommendation, the department has undertaken a review of all policies, advice, and procedures on the Child Protection Manual regarding missing children and has drafted updates to provide clear guidance to Child Protection and to clarify roles and responsibilities. The department has consulted with internal DFFH stakeholders and Victoria Police to prepare the updated guidance. The updated guidance is in the final review phase and is expected to be finalised in June 2024. Final review is underway with a view that the updates are published on the Child Protection Manual in June 2024, which will complete this recommendation. The department will engage with the Children’s Court through routine consultations, such as regular meetings with the President and Chief Executive Officer, and promote to the residential care workforce through the new consolidated program requirements for therapeutic care, the funded agency channel and the residential care learning and development strategy.</p>	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to reviewing the updated guidance.

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Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
13	<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review the procedure for withdrawal or cancellation of warrants and facilitate swift notification through an electronic process where possible • ensure that if a child or young person returns to a residential care house of their own accord, police are not required to sight the child or young person and hold them until an assessment is conducted prior to cancelling a warrant, but an assessment must occur within 24 hours of the child or young person's return. <p>The department should ensure all relevant guidelines, policy documents and training are updated to reflect streamlined processes, definitions and roles, including relevant sections of the Child Protection Manual, Protecting children: protocol between the Department of Human Services, Child Protection and Victoria Police (2012), and the addendum to the protocol, Preventing sexual exploitation of children and young people in out-of-home care (2014).</p>				
14.1	<p>That, as part of a review of media alert policy and practice, the department work with Victoria Police to assess the impact that media alerts have had in the past when a child or young person is absent or missing to identify the circumstances in which they are an effective tool. The findings of this review should inform the parameters of their use, including the level of approval required to issue an alert.</p>	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>To deliver on the intent of this recommendation, the department has engaged with Victoria Police to review and strengthen the media alert policy and practice guidance. Final stakeholder engagement is underway with a view to the updates being published on the Child Protection Manual in 2024, which will complete this recommendation.</p>	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to reviewing the updated guidance.
14.2	<p>That, when a media alert is issued, the department ensure that Victoria Police is provided with a positive photo of the child or young person, where possible. The department should also work with Victoria Police to disable or moderate social media commentary attached to media alert posts.</p>	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>This recommendation is being addressed alongside recommendation 14.1. Please refer to the update for recommendation 14.1.</p>	Progress made	The Commission looks forward to reviewing the updated guidance.

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15.1	That the department provide further guidance and training on the purpose of return to care conversations, emphasising the importance of conducting them from a position of care and concern while gathering information concerning risk and harm to the child or young person. This guidance and training should also emphasise the importance of incorporating the information gathered through return to care conversations in planning reviews and information templates for the child or young person.	In progress	This recommendation remains in progress. The missing children and young people practice guidance has been updated regarding return to care conversations, including information regarding timelines for return to care conversations and strengthening the focus on what a care conversation is. To deliver on the intent of this recommendation, additional work is underway as described in the response to recommendation 13.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes this work and looks forward to reviewing the revised guidance.
15.2	That, when implementing the recommendation from <i>In our own words</i> to establish a child and young person-centred complaints function, the department require that children and young people are offered the opportunity to speak to an independent person either to conduct the return to care conversation or following the return to care conversation (within 48 hours).	Complete	The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been delivered. <i>The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Act 2023</i> passed the Victorian Parliament and was given Royal Assent on 27 June 2023. The Act amends the <i>Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012</i> to enable the Commission to advocate for and provide advice, information and support for children and young people in care.	Progress made	The Commission has welcomed the implementation of this recommendation by providing the Commission with new advocacy powers, noting that that this new function is yet to be resourced. The Commission also notes that the recommendation requires all agencies to ensure return to care conversations include advice about the fact young people can contact the Commission, and that it is unclear any action to that end has been taken.
15.3	That information collected in return to care conversations should be recorded in a manner that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensures it can be identified as a record of a return to care conversation • enables compliance monitoring • enables systemic monitoring to identify areas of risk across all parts and levels of the system. 	In progress	This recommendation remains in progress. This recommendation is being addressed alongside recommendation 15.1. Please refer to the update for recommendation 15.1.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes this work and looks forward to reviewing the revised guidance.

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continued

Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16.2	<p>That, if a child or young person is admitted to secure welfare, the department ensure processes are in place for the child or young person’s care team to meet regularly while the child or young person is there and to use it as an opportunity to build stronger relationships between the child or young person and key care team members (for example, through daily visits if possible) and to engage in a planning review. Planning should include a clear exit plan for the child or young person, which is clearly identified as such on CRIS.</p>	Complete	<p>The department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been completed.</p> <p>Planning meetings are held within 48 hours of a child’s admission to secure care to which members of the child’s care team are invited. For a young person who requires a long admission, review meetings are then held within seven days of the 48-hour meeting and at subsequent seven-day intervals through the period of the young person’s admission. Care teams may also meet more frequently than this depending on the child’s circumstances and care needs. Where a care team has not yet been established, this must be identified at the 48-hour planning meeting and established as a priority.</p> <p>The frequency of visits by care team members is considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the needs and priorities of the young person and balanced with other actions to support the young person.</p> <p>Exit meetings are held prior to each young person’s exit from secure care, typically one business day prior to exit, with exit planning occurring in consultation with the child’s care team and with a focus on the child’s successful transition back to the community.</p> <p>Other recent improvements to secure care that meet the intent of the recommendation to enhance support provided to the child during their admission include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The availability of an on-call nurse 24 hours, seven-day a week to provide a medical review of all young people entering secure care. This arrangement has been maintained since it was first implemented during the COVID 19 pandemic and complements the availability of a YSAS nurse onsite seven days a week and a doctor four days per week • The provision of identified child-friendly rooms for family, including sibling, contact • Unlimited phone calls for young people, where safe and appropriate, and • Exit surveys for all young people to capture feedback and the young person’s voice about their experience. 	Not progressed in current reporting year	<p>The Commission is disappointed to see that work planned in relation to this recommendation has not progressed. The Commission further notes that earlier updates included a commitment to reviewing practice guidance and to consideration of compliance monitoring mechanisms.</p>

Progress against past inquiries: *Out of sight*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
16.3	That, other than when admission to secure welfare is court-ordered, the department ensure that secure welfare is only used after other options are considered. To ensure alternative options are viable, the department should review and remove barriers to their use where possible, including streamlining approval processes and providing adequate resources to enable children and young people's access to these alternatives.	Complete	<p>The department considers that this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>The <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> and the <i>Child Protection Manual</i> provide clear parameters on the use of secure care (i.e. no other placement or support is adequate to protect a child/young person). To the extent that this recommendation relates to authorisations and funding for activities that can act as circuit breakers (e.g. camps), see responses to recommendations 2.3 of this report and 7f of <i>In our own words</i> report respectively.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes the work in relation to children and young people in home-based care and will continue to keep this recommendation open while progress is made in relation to children and young people in residential care.

Progress against past inquiries: *Out of sight*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
17	<p>That, when implementing the recommendation from <i>In our own words</i> to improve government monitoring of out-of-home care, the Victorian Government improve information collection and monitoring and oversight mechanisms concerning children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care. Key indicators should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the rate children and young people are absent or missing from residential care (not just reported as absent) • the length of time children and young people are absent or missing from residential care • the number of missing person reports made for children and young people absent or missing from residential care • the number of warrants issued for children and young people absent or missing from residential care • where it is possible to ascertain, the exposure of children and young people to key risks while absent or missing from residential care, including sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and criminal activity, alcohol and other substance use, and adverse health risks • where it is possible to ascertain, harm suffered by children and young people when they are absent or missing from residential care, such as sexual assault, physical injuries, mental health consequences, criminal charges and criminal victimisation • where it is possible to ascertain, where children and young people go and who they are with when they are absent or missing from residential care. <p>This information should be collated, analysed and monitored to identify individual children and young people at risk, and systemic areas of existing and emerging risks, to inform case management and policy responses.</p>	Complete	<p>The department considers that this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>Child Protection teams and sexual exploitation practice leaders use a suite of data tools and reports to provide insight into the risk profiles of children missing from care. Monitoring of data trends and analysis assists with decision-making, improvements to services delivery and implementation of mitigating actions to keep children safe.</p>	Completed	<p>The Commission welcomes the work that has been done to improve collection of data in relation to children and young people who are absent or missing from care. It will be critical to ensure that governance mechanisms and practice ensure the data is used to appropriately address safety risks to children in a timely way.</p>

Progress against past inquiries: *Out of sight*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation Text	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
18	That the department review the operation of CIMS, including reporting thresholds, in respect of absent client incidents and sexual exploitation incidents to ensure an appropriate level of review and response, and improve systemic oversight.	In progress	CIMS operates as one part of the department's multifaceted safeguarding approach. To streamline reporting requirements to enable service providers to direct their resources in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the client, the CIMS Review is prioritising reducing duplication where possible. The CIMS Review has undertaken a review of CIMS policy definitions, including the definition of absent client and sexual exploitation, to improve the reporting, response to and oversight of incidents which harm clients during service delivery. Consultation with the Commission occurred throughout this work. The revision of CIMS policy definitions will improve the consistency of incident identification and reporting of confirmed sexual exploitation and absent clients in CIMS. Updated policy definitions will be implemented later in 2024.	Progress made	The Commission hopes that the implementation of findings from the CIMS review addresses the issue of serious underreporting of children and young people missing from care and those victimised by child sexual exploitation.