

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates
23 May 2022

PORTFOLIO: Child Protection and Family Services

Witnesses:

- The Hon. Anthony Carbines MP
- Ms Brigid Sunderland
- Ms Janine Toomey
- Mr Argiri Alisandratos
- Mr Andrew Minack

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

QUESTION 1

a) What is the exact figure of funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations for initiatives in this current budget?

Mr HIBBINS: Do you have the figure?

Mr CARBINES: Sorry, Mr Hibbins?

Mr HIBBINS: Just the figure in terms of the funding to Aboriginal community controlled organisations— do you have the exact figure in terms of what that funding amount is for initiatives in this budget?

Mr CARBINES: I will check with my colleagues. But I suppose what we are saying is there is the \$160 million that is *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir*. Then of the other additional funding across child protection and family services our ACCOs will have a proportion of that additional funding of \$21.4 million in 2022–23. Unless there was a specific figure that we wanted to touch on—

Mr HIBBINS: Can you get that on notice, if possible?

Mr CARBINES: Happy to, because I think also we would be able to acquit that—if not now, then at least as we have acquitted the funding we would be able to look back and provide it. But we will have a look at what we can provide further, Mr Hibbins, in relation to that, but making just that broader point that there is other additional expenditure in family services that we want to continue to drive to our Aboriginal—

Hearing Transcript, p. 9

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Hibbins

RESPONSE

Answer:

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing notes the context of the question was regarding allocation of new funding announced in the 2022-23 State Budget to Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) to provide child protection and family services.

In the 2022-23 State Budget:

- \$2.8 million over two years will be provided to ACCOs for an additional nine Senior Cultural Adviser positions.
- \$3.1 million over two years will be provided to ACCOs through the Aboriginal Innovation and Learning Fund, distributed to ACCOs through a grants program.
- Of the Family Services demand funding (\$40.7 million over three years) at least 10 per cent will be funded to and delivered by ACCOs. The funding allocations will be finalised based on analysis of demand, population and existing investment.
- Of the Family Services disability funding (\$21.4 million over two years) 13 per cent is delivered by ACCOs.
- Of the almost \$13 million over two years to continue the trial of the Care Hub in the Loddon area, funding is allocated for a cultural support worker, delivered by a local ACCO.
- Of the \$19 million in 2022-23 to deliver enhanced supports for up to 150 residential care placements, there are two ACCOs that deliver residential care in Victoria. Allocations to ACCOs will be finalised based on analysis of demand and existing supports and investment.

QUESTION 2

2. How many children and young people known to child protection are waiting for their case to be assigned? Out of how many cases in total?

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Secretary, can I ask you a couple of data-related questions further to the minister's previous answers. How many children known to child protection are currently waiting for their case to be assigned to a protection worker?

Ms SUNDERLAND: I can answer that question—thanks for the question—in terms of a percentage. So we have got—

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Or just the number—whatever number you have with you.

Ms SUNDERLAND: Yes. The number I have is 13.8 per cent of children and young people awaiting allocation.

Mr NEWBURY: Sorry, are waiting for an allocation? And what is that as a number, that 13.8?

Ms SUNDERLAND: I do not have the number. I would have to do the maths on that. But it is of the total number of children that we have got at intake.

Mr NEWBURY: Do you have that total number with you?

Ms SUNDERLAND: Not with us at the moment, no. I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr NEWBURY: Please. Do you have a kind of rough idea—I mean, 13 of 10 or 13 of 10 000? Do you have any kind of number with you? You do not know how many children are under your remit? You have no idea of that number?

The CHAIR: Mr Newbury, your question has been answered, and it has been taken on notice for further clarification. I think the point is—

Mr NEWBURY: Well, it is extraordinary that the department does not have an idea of how many children are within its remit.

Hearing Transcript, p. 9–10

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Newbury

RESPONSE

Answer:

As at 31 March 2022, across the child protection program there were 15,385* cases allocated to a specific child protection practitioner, and 2,537* that were being actively monitored by a team of practitioners. While referred to as 'unallocated' because the child or young person has not been allocated to a single Child Protection Practitioner based on risk assessment, the child or young person is in fact being actively monitored by a team of child protection practitioners.

Active monitoring by a team includes face-to-face visits with children, carers and families, gathering information from professionals engaged with those children and young people, including physicians and psychologists as well as a number of other monitoring and support activities.

Children and young people in this category may include those whose circumstances have been assessed as no longer requiring Child Protection assistance and whose case is ready to be closed.

It may also include children or young people whose family or care arrangements are considered stable or those who have reunified with their family as well as children and young people in long term foster care or children and young people who are being cared for by members of their extended family under what is known as kinship care arrangements.

In 2022-23 the Victorian State Government is investing \$271.6 million across child protection and family services, building on the \$1.2 billion boost in 2021-22 for at-risk children, their families and carers. This brings the total new investment in Children and Families to almost \$2.8 billion over the four years from 2019-20 to 2022-23:

- Total annual investment has increased by over 35 per cent since the 2018-19 Budget
- Total annual investment has increased by over 84 per cent since the 2015-16 Budget

*NB this is a point in time figure and is subject to fluctuation

QUESTION 3

3. Do you have data relating to the number of face-to-face visits over time, including reduction in face-to-face visits during lockdowns?

Mr NEWBURY: Yes. Thank you. During lockdowns there was a reduction in face-to-face visits. Do you have any data on the number of visits over time, either with you or—

Ms SUNDERLAND: I do not have the data on the reduction in face-to-face visits. But as you note, there were face-to-face visits during that time.

Mr NEWBURY: Would you mind taking that notice?

Ms SUNDERLAND: We can take that on notice.

Hearing Transcript, p. 10

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Newbury

RESPONSE

Answer:

Data collection on face-to-face ongoing visits was introduced from 12 October 2020. As this is a new data collection we expect these results to be an undercount.

The number of face-to-face first and ongoing visits from 12 October 2020 to 24 May 2022 is 124,753.

The average number of face-to-face visits per day in lockdown (128 days in total over the period of 12 October 2020 to 24 May 2022) is 212.7.

The average number of face-to-face visits per day when not in lockdown (462 days) is 211.1.

There was no reduction in face-to-face visits by child protection workers over this period. Children and young people were also seen through other mechanisms such as supervised contact visits with parents, and by other support providers.

Video and telephone contact by child protection workers also continued to occur during this time.

QUESTION 4

4. Provide a breakdown of the child death data from the recent Commission for Children and Young People report

Mrs McARTHUR: The recent Commission for Children and Young People annual report found there had been a disproportionate increase in deaths of Aboriginal children in recent years, including 13 of the 45 deaths last year. In 2022 how is this tolerable?

Ms SUNDERLAND: No child death is ever tolerable. That is absolutely not what we would be saying. I can take you through what we know, the breakdown of those child deaths.

Mrs McARTHUR: But how has it happened?

Ms SUNDERLAND: Some of them are accidental, some of them are from natural causes—there are SIDS deaths included in that data. I can take you through the breakdown if that is helpful for you, but—

Mrs McARTHUR: Great. Give it to us on notice; that will be terrific.

Hearing Transcript, p. 13

Name of Committee member asking question: Ms McArthur

RESPONSE

Answer:

In 2020-2021, there were 45 deaths of children known to child protection in the 12 months preceding their death. This is a decrease of 6 (12 percent) when compared to the previous financial year (2019-20).

The Commission for Children and Young People, in their tabled annual report, have categorised the deaths as follows:

- 9 accidental
- 9 medical illness/condition
- 1 non accidental trauma
- 8 Sudden Infant Death Syndrome/Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy
- 14 pending / unascertained
- 4 suicide/ self harm