



Monday 8 July 2024

TWO NEW REPORTS CONFIRM NSW GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED AT RISK KIDS

According to the latest independent reports, the New South Wales child protection system remains in a state of crisis when it comes to protecting at risk children, prompting urgent calls for increased early intervention funding.

On Friday the NSW Ombudsman released a special report 'Protecting children at risk: an assessment of whether the Department of Communities and Justice is meeting its core responsibilities,' which concludes that the Department of Communities has failed to meet its core child protection responsibilities.

The findings show that over the past eight years, an increasing number of children have been reported at risk of significant harm more than once, with the number who are reported five or more times in a year having doubled.

At the same time, the proportion of children reported at risk of serious harm who do not receive a face-to-face response by a government caseworker has increased from 71% to 75% between 2017-18 and 2022-23.

Available data also suggests that things are not improving for children who do go into out of home care, especially for Aboriginal children.

This was a concern reinforced by AbSec, the NSW child, family, and community peak Aboriginal corporation, which released its 'Family Is Culture Community Report Card'.

This report card highlights that in NSW, Aboriginal children are being removed from their families at 10.5 times the rate of on-Aboriginal children, with the rate of removals significantly increasing year on year.

Fams Chief Executive Officer Susan Watson said sadly Aboriginal children in Australia face disproportionately high rates of removal from their families and supports Absec's calls for the establishment of an Aboriginal Commissioner.

"The latest data shows Aboriginal children comprise almost 46% of the total out of home care population in NSW – and these vulnerable children are often failed by current child protection or out of home care systems," she said.

"We acknowledge the government's efforts to strengthen the state's out-of-home care system, but a significant gap in funding between early intervention and crisis services continues to place more children at risk.



"The government needs to urgently redesign service models to better support at risk children and families.

You can't just throw money at crisis services and expect long term positive change - we need far greater investment in early intervention and prevention programs. "

"We urgently need to focus efforts on preventing kids from entering out-of-home care at all. This is crucial to stem the tide of children reported - or tragically rereported - as vulnerable and ending up in out-of-home care."

Less than 9% of the spend on NSW child protection services is spent on early intervention and prevention services - this needs to be increased by 25% across early intervention and prevention programs.

"It is an inadequate and naïve response to react with band aid measures to break the cycle of trauma and abuse," Ms Watson said. "Early support and keeping families together must be the top priority to ensure enduring and meaningful change."

Fams is a New South Wales peak body that advocates for improved policies for children, families, communities, and services. For more information about Fams go to www.fams.asn.au

Media contact: Phil McCall 0438 619 987