

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**  
**Inquiry into the 2023–24 Budget Estimates**  
**15 June 2023**

**PORTFOLIO: CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**Witnesses:**

- The Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn MP
- Ms. Raylene Harradine
- Mr Danny O’Kelly
- Ms Peta McCammon
- Ms Annette Lancy

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**QUESTION 1**

**a) Provide information on the child protection practitioner staff vacancies to be filled across Victoria**

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** Thank you, Minister. Do you know how many child protection practitioner and staff vacancies are currently needing to be filled across Victoria?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** If I look at the last briefing which I received in relation to vacancies, there are currently 517.

**Nicholas McGOWAN:** And is that 517 FTE? Is there a breakdown in front of you – or that is hard to tell, I guess.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** That is FTE, yes.

**Peta McCAMMON:** We might just clarify that. It would not be very different in terms of people FTE, but we can clarify that. I would add, though, it is a very dynamic figure, so that is a point in time, and obviously it is something that we are working very hard to minimise – that number over the trajectory.

*Hearing Transcript, p. 2*

**Name of Committee members asking question: Mr Nicholas McGowan**

**RESPONSE**

**Answer:**

**Table 1: Child Protection establishment overview with current vacancies (data as at 30 May 2023).**

Classification	CPP2	CPP3	CPP4	CPP5	CPP6	Totals
CPOM Target	213.0	613.5	757.8	814.8	87.0	2486.1
FTE	166.3	515.0	558.6	697.4	85.4	2022.7
Vacant	46.7	98.5	199.2	117.4	1.6	463.4

**QUESTION 2**

**2. Provide information on the breakdown of current child protection practitioners by classification/role (FTE)**

Nicholas McGOWAN: How many child protection staff do we have in total?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: We have funding for 1180 child protection practitioners.

Nicholas McGOWAN: And is that FTE again? I am sorry to be finicky.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Yes.

Nicholas McGOWAN: That is? Okay. Is that number actually higher than that, because obviously some of them might be part-time et cetera?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I might refer to the Deputy Secretary of operations to provide further detail on the breakdown.

Danny O’KELLY: Sorry, Mr McGowan, I did not hear the first part of your question.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Sure: how many child protection officers do you have in total? I think the number was 1180. I am just trying to understand is that FTE, that number, or is it actually a number that is larger?

Danny O’KELLY: The number is larger. Our number of staff at the moment is just over 2200. Our funded base is significantly more than that. Not all of our FTE are protective interveners, though. We have a significant number of CPP2s at the moment, which is one of our pipelines where we sort of grow and develop new child protection workers to come into the system, and some of the vacancies that the minister referenced a little earlier sit at our 4 and 5 levels, which is where our more experienced practitioners are. So a significant part of our recruitment effort is really trying to bring in more people at those 4 and 5 levels. But our staffing numbers if we roll in our CPP2s, who are part of our workforce – an important part of our workforce –are at about 2200. It is a very dynamic figure, and we are bringing in –

Nicholas McGOWAN: Are you able to provide that breakdown for us?

Danny O’KELLY: A breakdown of –

Nicholas McGOWAN: Yes, the different categories, and how –

Danny O’KELLY: Of FTE by levels?

Danny O’BRIEN: And role.

Danny O’KELLY: Yes.

*Hearing Transcript, p. 3*

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Nicholas McGowan and Mr Danny O'Brien

**RESPONSE**

Answer:

Table 1: Child Protection establishment overview with current vacancies (data as at 30 May 2023).

Classification	CPP2	CPP3	CPP4	CPP5	CPP6	Totals
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Vacant	46.7	98.5	199.2	117.4	1.6	463.4

**QUESTION 3**

**3. Provide information on the number of children awaiting allocation of a caseworker by each region and, if available, LGA in Victoria.**

**Bev McARTHUR:** Not unallocated, okay. Could you provide, by chance, the number of children awaiting allocation of a caseworker by each LGA in Victoria?

**Peta McCAMMON:** We do provide quarterly data across our four regions. I would have to check with the team whether we could have anything more granular, but we do provide the four: north, south, east and west.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** On the website.

**Peta McCAMMON:** On the website.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Perhaps if we get that for a start.

**Peta McCAMMON:** Sure.

**Bev McARTHUR:** And if there is more, that would be fabulous. Thank you.

*Hearing Transcript, p. 5-6*

**Name of Committee member asking question:** Mrs Bev McArthur

**RESPONSE****Answer:**

While referred to as 'awaiting allocation' because the child or young person has not been allocated to an individual Child Protection Practitioner, these children and young people are actively monitored by a team manager and are allocated to practitioners based on risk.

Active monitoring includes face-to-face visits with children, carers and families, and gathering information from professionals engaged with those children and young people, as the monitored children and families are usually involved with other support services.

**Table 1: Cases awaiting allocation - Quarter 3 2022-23**

Region	Cases awaiting allocation
North	613
South	818
East	468
West	906
Statewide Services	32

## QUESTION 4

### 4. Provide information on the number of children placed in contingency placements for 2021-22.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** I do understand that, Mr O'Kelly. I am just wondering: do you have the data on kids who could not go into foster care – where they went – or kinship care for that matter?

**Danny O'KELLY:** Usually if we are in a situation where the safety risk is so significant that we need a placement and we are unable to place that young person with a foster carer or with family, our next option is residential care, and an option after that would be a contingency placement, which is usually like a house with staff wrapped around it.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Yes. I am after data on that if you have got it.

**Danny O'KELLY:** There is a very small number of circumstances where children have ended up where there might have been a small period of time that they spent in hotel with staff –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** You say 'very small'. Have you got data – the actual number?

**Danny O'KELLY:** I have not got the kids who are in hotels separated from kids who are in contingency placements.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. Could you give me whatever numbers you have got?

**Danny O'KELLY:** As at today, we have only got 53, which is a significantly reducing number. We have got 53 kids who are in what we define as contingency placements.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Right. That is basically in a home with someone looking after them or in a hotel room?

**Danny O'KELLY:** Most of them are in a home with an agency looking after them, and a significant number of those are in almost a bespoke arrangement where, because of need and circumstance, we have had to engage a specialist provider to come in provide support. It might be around disability need or it might be around significant supports that they have –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Could I get that figure for 2021–22 if there is an end of year figure – as in how many over the year were in that sort of accommodation?

**Danny O'KELLY:** Across a full year?

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Yes. I am happy to take it on notice. Can I ask –

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**Danny O'BRIEN:** Chair, point of order?

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, on a point of order.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Mr O'Kelly and the minister were going to provide me some data points.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** We can provide those to you on notice, Danny.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** You don't have them now?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I had some more commentary I guess around the education, but we will take your questions and provide them to you.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Thank you.

**Danny O'KELLY:** It is not broken down in the way that you have asked.

**Danny O'BRIEN: If you can provide whatever you can, that would be great. Thank you.**

*Hearing Transcript, p. 9, 15*

**Name of Committee member asking question:** Mr Danny O'Brien

**RESPONSE**

**Answer:**

Contingency care arrangements are utilised when there are no other suitable funded placements available or where there is an urgent need for a short-term placement whilst an ongoing placement is identified.

Contingency care arrangements provide an important safety net for children who are unable to be accommodated in other forms of care for instance due to:

- a short-term urgent, often afterhours, placement need
- the child or young person's highly complex needs cannot be catered for in a funded placement, and a contingency placement allows for a more tailored and flexible response
- the importance of keeping sibling groups together sometimes means a specific placement (contingency) needs to be established.

Total clients in contingency placements over 2021-22 is 205.

## QUESTION 5

**5. Provide information on how many children under the age of 12 are in residential care, and the age of the youngest child in residential care.**

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Yes. Can I ask, Mr O'Kelly, how many children under the age of 12 are currently in residential care?

**Danny O'KELLY:** I could come back to you on that exact data, because it may well be different today from a week ago.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Do have quarterly data or anything there at the moment?

**Danny O'KELLY:** Not specifically for under 12s at hand.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Righto. Can you tell me the age of the youngest child in resi care?

**Danny O'KELLY:** Not at hand; I have not got that at hand, but we can provide that.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** You are happy to take it on notice?

**Danny O'KELLY:** Yes.

*Hearing Transcript, p. 10*

**Name of Committee member asking question:** Mr Danny O'Brien

## RESPONSE

### Answer:

The priority of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is to place children in kinship or foster care, however there are times when placements need to be made at short notice and home-based care options are not available.

When home-based care is not possible, or where the trauma needs of a young person requires a more intensive facility-based response, residential care is provided to support young people. At times, this may include children under the age of 12, including where sibling groups are placed together.

As of 15 June 2023, there were 45 children aged under the age of 12 years in residential care.

The youngest child in a residential care placement was 5 years of age. This child has severe disability and is diagnosed with several chronic health and medical conditions that impact communication, hearing, mobility, and basic self-care. This placement is being used to support a transition into a long-term home-based care arrangement.

## QUESTION 6

### 6. Provide information on the number of allegations relating to sexual abuse in residential care

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. In the brief time I have got left, Minister, in the latest child protection quarterly incident report there were 322 incidents recorded of abuse. Are you able to tell me how many of those allegations of abuse related to sexual abuse in residential care?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I will pass that to the Deputy Secretary.

Danny O'KELLY: Yes, and I will just have to try and find that specific data.

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Danny O'BRIEN: Chair, point of order?

The CHAIR: Mr O'Brien, on a point of order.

Danny O'BRIEN: Mr O'Kelly and the minister were going to provide me some data points.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: We can provide those to you on notice, Danny.

Danny O'BRIEN: You don't have them now?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I had some more commentary I guess around the education, but we will take your questions and provide them to you.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you.

Danny O'KELLY: It is not broken down in the way that you have asked.

Danny O'BRIEN: If you can provide whatever you can, that would be great. Thank you.

*Hearing Transcript, p. 10, 15*

Name of Committee member asking question: Mr Danny O'Brien

## RESPONSE

### Answer:

Incident reporting data is a snapshot in time of allegations made by clients of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and includes disclosures of historic abuse. They are recorded and remain as incidents regardless of whether further information becomes available to substantiate or disprove an event.

The department publishes data each quarter of the number of client incidents reported in the child protection and family services system.

In the latest published data (Quarter 3 2022-23), of the 322 incidents of abuse reported, 76 were allegations of sexual abuse, made in relation to clients in residential care services.

## QUESTION 7

### 7. Provide information on absenteeism and school attendance rates for children in residential care

**Danny O'BRIEN:** If you have got data there in front of you, Mr O'Kelly, while you are looking for it, I am also looking for incidents of absenteeism – kids that have run away, effectively – and school attendance rates for kids in residential care, if you have it.

**Danny O'KELLY:** We have got all of that data. They are in separate places, and I do not want to give –

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Okay. I will start with the sexual abuse, if you have got it.

**Danny O'KELLY:** The number of incident reports that –

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**Danny O'BRIEN:** Chair, point of order?

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, on a point of order.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Mr O'Kelly and the minister were going to provide me some data points.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** We can provide those to you on notice, Danny.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** You don't have them now?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I had some more commentary I guess around the education, but we will take your questions and provide them to you.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Thank you.

**Danny O'KELLY:** It is not broken down in the way that you have asked.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** If you can provide whatever you can, that would be great. Thank you.

*Hearing Transcript, p. 10, 15*

**Name of Committee member asking question:** Mr Danny O'Brien

## RESPONSE

**Answer:**

### School attendance rates

The young person's care team shares responsibility for day-to-day care matters, including doing the things parents would do for their own child. The case manager with the assistance of the care team supports the young person's engagement in education and monitors their attendance at the individual case level.

The department works closely with the Department of Education and signatories under the Out of Home Care Partnering Agreements, to ensure processes are in place to actively support the educational achievement of every student in Care Services. A key part of this is the LOOKOUT Program, established in 2016 and expanded in 2018 beyond schools to include early childhood support. LOOKOUT Centres exist in each of the four Department of Education regions supporting the four department divisions.

### Absent Clients

The Client Incident Management System (CIMS) policy prescribes the need for an incident report for children and young people who are unexpectedly absent or absent without authorisation and there are concerns for their safety.



In September 2021 the department produced and released additional supporting documentation to service providers to support their assessment of these incidents and strengthen decision making and compliance with the CIMS policy.

A review of CIMS will improve understanding of how key information relevant to children and young people who are absent or missing from care, and the risks of harm to them, are captured across reporting system and inform possible system enhancements to address gaps.

In the published data for 2022-23, of the incident types reported in the “other” category, a subset of those were for children in residential care who were absent.