



Commissioner for Children and Young People  
Western Australia



# Profile of Children and Young People in WA 2024





## **Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

The Commissioner for Children and Young People proudly acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Western Australia and acknowledges the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation upon whose lands the Commissioner's office is located. She recognises the continuing connection to culture, lands, skies and waters, families and communities for all Aboriginal peoples.

The Commissioner and her team also pay their respects to all Elders, past and present and emerging leaders. They recognise the knowledge, insights and capabilities of Aboriginal people, and pay respect to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

## **A note about language**

Prior to colonisation Aboriginal people primarily communicated through oral use of language, were well versed in multiple languages to converse with surrounding groups for different contexts and responsibilities dependant on where you were located. Seasonal movement was quite common for hunting, gathering and other related responsibilities and language was often expressed through various forms of art, dance, songs and storytelling. The written form of language arose from the interpretation of Aboriginal words that were captured by historical documentation and non-Aboriginal linguists who relied on western interpretation of sounds. This then created various forms of spelling of Aboriginal words which can differ and are often accepted and recognised. For example, Noongar, Nyungar, Noongah.

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

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### **Acknowledgement**

Special thanks are given to Simranbir Kaur Sandhu, who undertook an internship through the McCusker Centre for Citizenship, for her contributions and assistance in preparing this publication.

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# Contents

## The profile ..... 3

## Population ..... 6

Births .....	7
Geographical distribution.....	9
Aboriginal children and young people .....	11
Cultural background.....	13
Disability.....	14
Family composition .....	15

## Childcare and education ..... 16

Childcare.....	16
Education.....	19

## Vulnerability ..... 22

Child poverty.....	22
Housing and homelessness .....	24
Developmental vulnerability .....	26
Children and young people in the child protection system .....	30
Children and young people in the youth justice system.....	32





# The profile

**As the Commissioner for Children and Young People I have a statutory responsibility to monitor the wellbeing of all children and young people living in Western Australia (WA) and to advocate on their behalf.**

The Profile publication is produced annually and provides a demographic profile of the children and young people (aged 0 to 17 years) in WA. It focuses on children and young people who experience vulnerability and hardship, such as those in the juvenile justice system, out-of-home care, with disability and living in poverty.

Our Wellbeing Monitoring Framework monitors the wellbeing of WA children and young people. It encompasses the following three components:

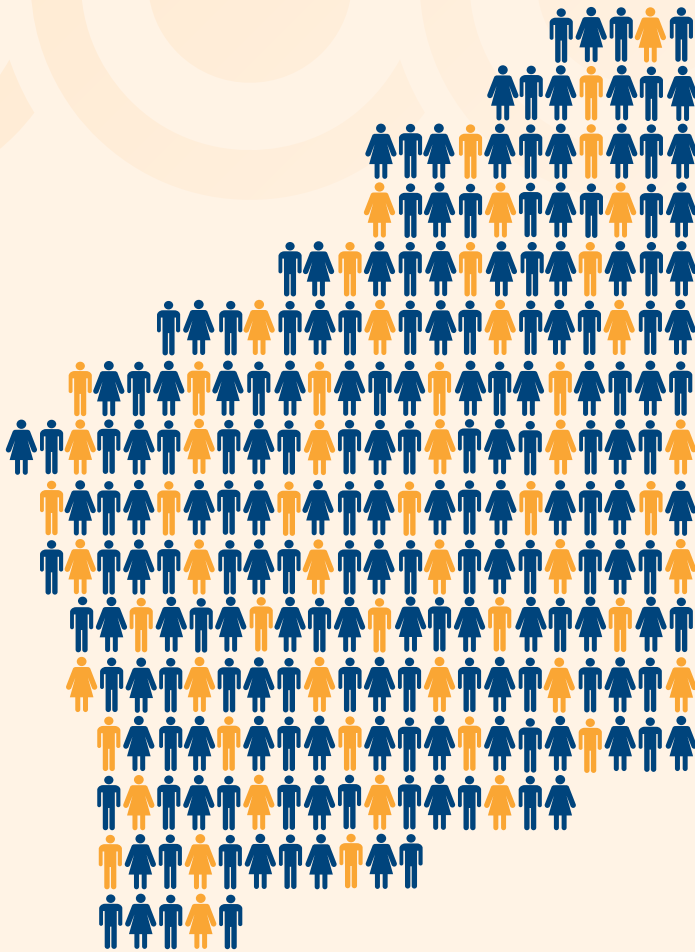


Additional information gained from children and young people via my Speaking Out Survey provides a comprehensive overview on their health and wellbeing. For more information, visit our website: [Commissioner for Children and Young People WA \(ccyp.wa.gov.au\)](http://ccyp.wa.gov.au).

It is disconcerting to see very little improvement, if any, for our most vulnerable children and young people. I urge governments and service providers to review their approaches to support children and young people and their families to achieve improved life outcomes.

**Jacqueline McGowan-Jones**  
Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia

# Western Australia's children and young people



Approximately

# 644,468

children and young people live in WA and make up **22 per cent** of the state's population



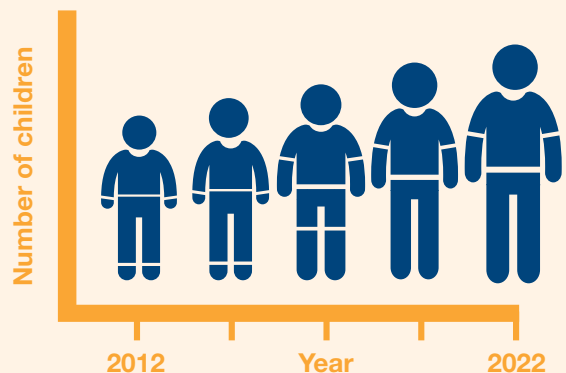
Poverty line



An estimated

# 107,000

children and young people are living below the poverty line in WA

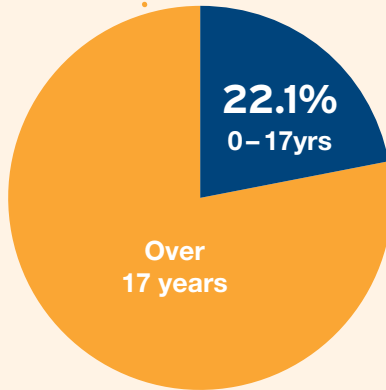


In the last 10 years there has been a **11 per cent** increase in the number of children aged 6 to 11 years living in WA

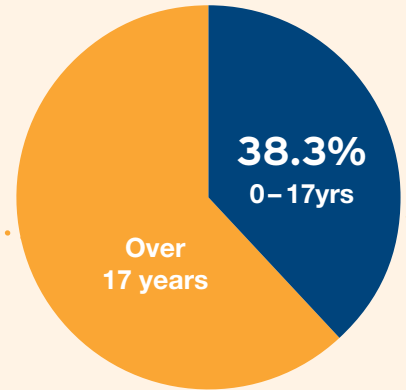
## Aboriginal children and young people

There are about **46,000**

Aboriginal children and young people aged 0 to 17 years in WA



WA non-Aboriginal population



WA Aboriginal population



In 2022

**31,709**

births were registered in WA

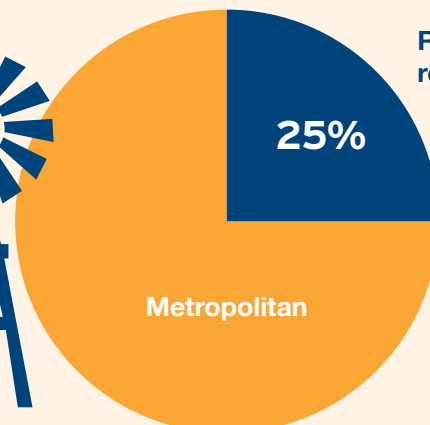
**124**

children and young people aged 10 to 13 years were held in detention during the year, only one of them was sentenced



Around **155,000**

children and young people in WA live in regional and remote areas



Regional and remote areas

Metropolitan



# Population

WA is home to approximately 644,468 children and young people, who represent 22 per cent of WA's total population.

The number of children and young people in WA increased between June 2022 and June 2023, however the proportion of children and young people within the population decreased during this time (Table 1).

**Table 1: Children and young people aged 0 to 17 years, number and per cent, WA and Australia, 2021 to 2023**

	WA			Australia*
	2023	2022	2021	2023
<b>Children and young people</b>	<b>644,468</b>	<b>633,757</b>	<b>620,104</b>	<b>5,754,827</b>
Total population (all ages)	2,878,563	2,785,312	2,718,400	26,638,544
Proportion of total population (%)	22.3	22.8	22.8	21.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, *National, state and territory population, June 2023*, ABS

\* Australian estimates include the Jervis Bay Territory, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands



# Population

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the gender distribution of children and young people in Western Australia is consistent with last year, with 51.5 per cent male and 48.5 per cent female. This distribution is also consistent with most Australian states and territories and the national distribution.<sup>1</sup>

From 2014 to 2023 the number of 0 to 17 year-olds in WA increased by over 58,105 or 7.6 per cent (Table 2). The largest increase occurred in the secondary school years for children aged 12 to 17 years (16.1%) followed by those aged 6 to 11 (14.5%).

**Table 2: Children and young people aged 0 to 17 years by age group, number and per cent, WA, 2014 and 2023.**

	2023		2014		Change from 2014 to 2023	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
0 to 5 years	205,045	31.8	205,320	35.0	687	-0.1
6 to 11 years	221,828	34.4	193,674	33.0	24,442	14.5
12 to 17 years	217,595	33.8	187,369	32.0	23,085	16.1
<b>0 to 17 years</b>	<b>644,468</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>586,363</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>58,105</b>	<b>10.0</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023, [National, state and territory population, June 2023](#)

## Births

After declining since the 1960s, WA's fertility rate increased in the early 2000s to reach 2.095 babies per woman in 2008 (a rate last reached in the late 1970s). Apart from a brief uptick in births per woman in 2021 (1.75), the fertility rate in WA has been steadily declining since this time to its present level of 1.61.<sup>2</sup>

The number of births in WA increased during the 2000s until 2016, when the number of births peaked at 35,652 for that year. From 2016 to 2020 the number of births per year decreased to 32,677. In 2021 there was an increase in births to 34,300, however this number decreased to 31,709 in 2022 (Figure 1). This was a 7.6 per cent decrease from 2021 and WA had the second-largest proportional decline across all states and territories in Australia.<sup>3</sup>

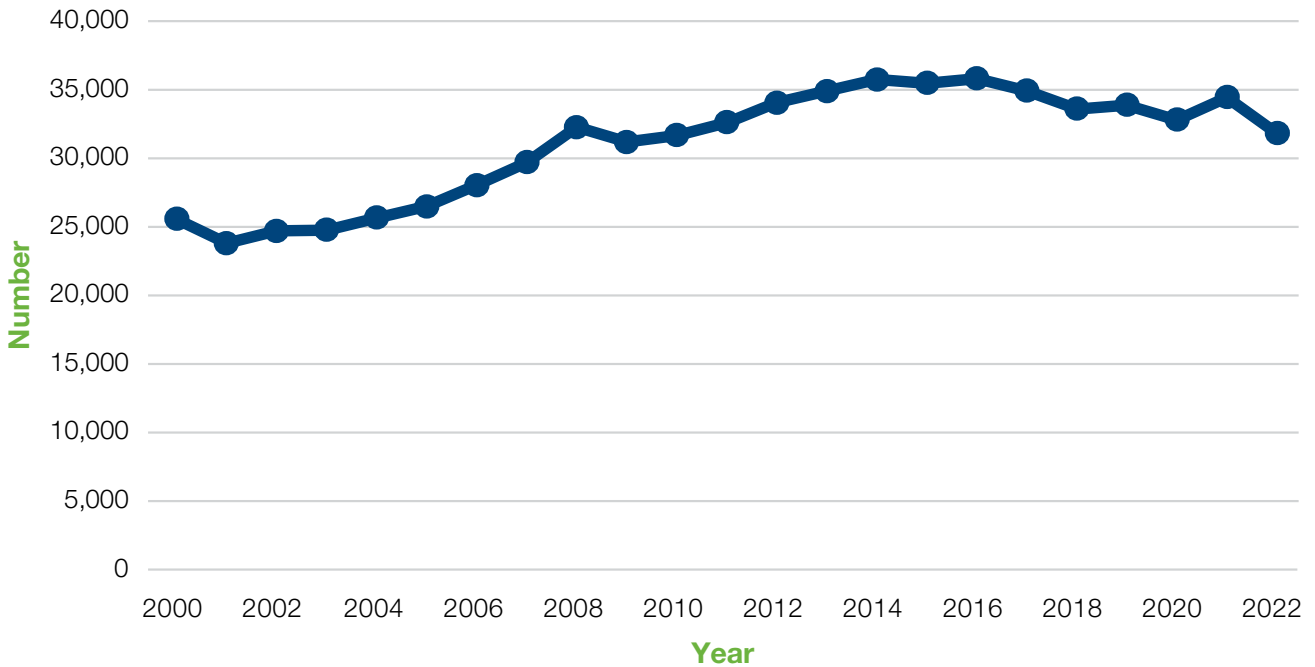
1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [National, state and territory population, June 2023](#), ABS.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [ABS Explorer, Fertility by age, by state](#), ABS.

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [Births, Australia](#), ABS.

# Population

**Figure 1: Total births, number, WA, 2000 to 2022**



Source: WA Department of Justice 2023, [WA Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages](#)

The median age of all mothers for births registered in WA in 2022 was 31.8 years (an increase in the median age of 30.3 recorded in 2012). The median age of all fathers was 33.7 years (also a slight increase from 32.7 recorded in 2012).<sup>4</sup>

There were 2,779 births (8.7% of all births) registered in WA during 2022 where at least one parent recorded themselves as Aboriginal on their child's birth registration form.<sup>5</sup>

In general, Aboriginal mothers give birth at a younger age than non-Aboriginal mothers. The median age of Aboriginal women who registered a birth in WA in 2022 was 26.6 years, approximately five years less than the median age of all mothers (31.8 years) but an increase on the median age of 24.7 years recorded for Aboriginal mothers in 2012.<sup>6</sup>

Correspondingly, the highest proportion of Aboriginal women giving birth is in the age group 20 to 24 years (28.0%) compared with 30 to 34 years for non-Aboriginal women (38.5%) (Figure 2).

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, [ABS Explorer, Confinements by nuptiality, by state](#), Confinements, by nuptiality, by state, ABS.

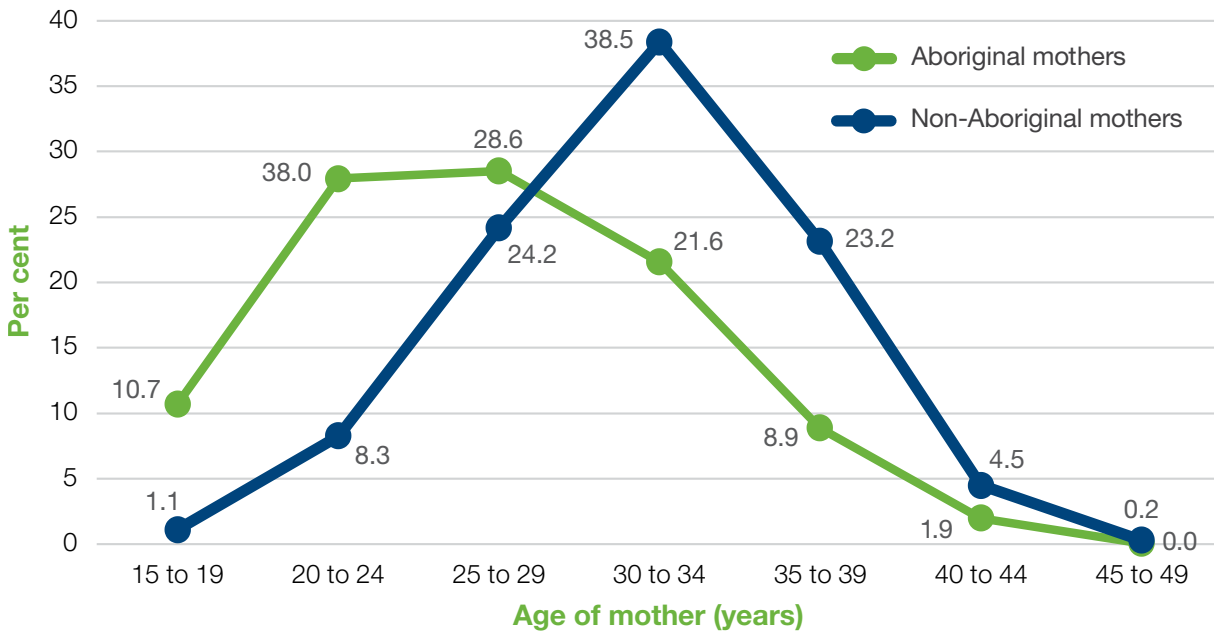
5 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, [ABS Explorer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births and confinements, summary, by state](#), ABS.

6 Ibid.



# Population

**Figure 2: Proportion of overall births by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers by age group, per cent, WA, 2022**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [ABS Explorer, Births by age by state](#), and [ABS Explorer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fertility, by age, by state](#)

Over the past decade, the total number of births in the 15 to 19 year-old cohort has declined by 54.2 per cent, from 1,322 in 2013 to 605 in 2022.<sup>7</sup> The number of births to Aboriginal mothers in this age group has decreased from 492 in 2013 to 298 in 2022 (-39.4%).<sup>8</sup>

## Geographical distribution

In 2021, three quarters (75.5%) of the population of 0 to 17 year-olds resided in the metropolitan area,<sup>9</sup> 15.8 per cent resided in regional areas and 8.7 per cent in remote areas of WA (3).

All metropolitan areas recorded an increase in the population of children and young people from 2021 to 2022, with Perth–North East recording a 1.4 per cent increase and Perth–South East a 1.3 per cent increase. However, regional and remote WA generally experienced varied changes in their overall populations of children and young people, with some areas recording relatively significant increases (Esperance: 0.7%, Mid West: 0.5% and Mandurah: 1.1%) and others a decline (Kimberley: 1.0%).

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [ABS Explorer, Fertility by age, by state](#), ABS.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, [ABS Explorer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fertility, by age, by state](#), ABS.

<sup>9</sup> The metropolitan area corresponds to the five Perth Statistical Area Level 4s as defined by the ABS. It does not include Mandurah.

# Population

**Table 3: Geographical distribution of children and young people aged 0 to 17 years by age group, number and per cent, WA, June 2022**

	0 to 5 years	6 to 11 years	12 to 17 years	Total 0 to 17 years	Change from 2020 to 2021	Proportion of WA children and young people
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Per cent	Per cent
<b>Metropolitan</b>	<b>156,694</b>	<b>163,802</b>	<b>157,925</b>	<b>478,421</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>75.5</b>
Perth – South East	42,721	44,689	41,305	128,715	1.3	20.3
Perth – South West	35,461	37,110	36,180	108,751	1.3	17.2
Perth – North East	22,962	22,679	21,327	66,968	1.4	10.5
Perth – North West	45,462	47,594	46,301	139,357	0.6	22.0
Perth – Inner	10,088	11,730	12,812	34,630	-0.2	5.5
<b>WA regional</b>	<b>29,767</b>	<b>34,705</b>	<b>35,521</b>	<b>99,993</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>15.8</b>
Mandurah	7,265	8,199	8,480	23,944	1.1	3.8
Bunbury*	13,305	15,773	16,459	45,537	1.0	7.2
Wheatbelt**	9,197	10,733	10,582	30,512	1.2	4.8
<b>WA remote</b>	<b>18,714</b>	<b>19,562</b>	<b>16,987</b>	<b>55,263</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>8.7</b>
Esperance	1,254	1,345	1,310	3,909	0.7	0.6
Goldfields	3,378	3,340	3,029	9,747	-0.9	1.5
Mid West	3,977	4,570	4,571	13,118	0.5	2.0
Gascoyne	767	772	619	2,158	0.5	0.3
Pilbara	5,801	5,640	4,144	15,585	0.7	2.5
Kimberley	3,537	3,895	3,314	10,746	-1.0	1.7
<b>Total WA</b>	<b>205,175</b>	<b>218,069</b>	<b>210,433</b>	<b>633,677</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, *Estimated Resident Population (ERP) by Statistical Area Level 3 and Statistical Area Level 4*, Custom report June 2022 and June 2021 [unpublished]

\* Includes Busselton, Margaret River, Augusta and Manjimup.

\*\* Includes Albany, Wheatbelt North and Wheatbelt South.

Notes:

1. The geographical distribution of WA's Estimated Resident Population is only available one year in arrears. Hence, presented here is the table for 2022.
2. Per cent totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
3. To provide a detailed picture of the geographical distribution of children and young people across WA, Statistical Area Level 4 (SA4) was chosen to represent areas within the metropolitan area and regional WA and Statistical Area Level 3 (SA3) for remote areas. For simplicity, some areas are classified as remote even though the main population centre local government area (LGA) may be classified as regional (e.g. Geraldton and the Mid West). For more information on these areas see: [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\)](#).



# Population

## Aboriginal children and young people

In 2022, Aboriginal children and young people (aged 0 to 17 years) represented 7.3 per cent of the total population of children and young people in WA (Table 4).<sup>10</sup>

**Table 4: Estimated residential population including children and young people aged 0 to 17 years by Aboriginal status, number and per cent, WA, 2022**

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Total
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number
0 to 17 years	45,930	7.3	581,450	92.7	627,380
<b>Total population</b>	<b>120,006</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>2,629,359</b>	<b>95.6</b>	<b>2,749,365</b>
Children and young people (0 to 17 years) as a proportion of population (per cent)	38.3		22.1		22.8

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2021*, Table 7.5 Estimated resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander, non-indigenous and total populations, Western Australia, single year of age (to 65 and over)-30 June 2021

Note: Final estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous and total populations of Australia at 30 June 2021 are based on results of the 2021 Census of Population and Housing.

The proportion of children and young people aged 0 to 17 years in the Aboriginal population is almost double that of the proportion of children and young people in the non-Aboriginal population (38.3% compared to 22.1%). The primary reasons for this are lower life expectancy and higher fertility rates of Aboriginal people compared to non-Aboriginal people.<sup>11</sup>

With respect to geographic distribution in 2021, around 51.0 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people aged 0 to 17 years live in regional and remote areas compared to 19.0 per cent of non-Aboriginal children and young people (Table 5). Around 18.0 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people live in very remote parts of WA, which is down from 23.5 per cent in 2016.

10 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, ABS.

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012, *4725.0 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing: A focus on children and youth*, April 2011, ABS.

# Population

**Table 5: Children and young people aged 0 to 17 years by remoteness area and Aboriginal status, number and per cent, WA, 2021**

	Non-Aboriginal		Aboriginal		Total*	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Major cities**	438,412	81.2	16,524	49.1	470,238	78.3
Inner regional	46,320	8.6	2,882	8.6	51,931	8.6
Outer regional	33,570	6.2	4,184	12.6	41,144	6.8
Remote	15,666	2.9	3,928	11.2	22,278	3.7
Very remote	5,780	1.1	6,145	18.4	13,694	2.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>539,748</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>33,840</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>600,170</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, Census of Population and Housing 2021, *Census TableBuilder: Dataset – Cultural diversity and remoteness area*.

\* Totals include Aboriginal status not stated and no usual address and therefore do not sum.

\*\* The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) defines remoteness areas into five classes of relative remoteness across Australia using a combination of population sizes (to define urban centres) and distances from urban centres. In this classification, Mandurah is included in the Major Cities category. Refer to the ABS, [1270.0.55.005 – Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\): Volume 5 – Remoteness Structure, July 2016](#) for more information.

Note: This data is from the 2021 Census which has not been adjusted for undercounting. Totals in the table are per the ABS and may not sum exactly.





# Population

## Cultural background

In 2021, 84.9 per cent of children and young people in WA were born in Australia.

For WA's children and young people, the most common country of birth after Australia is England (1.7%), followed by New Zealand (1.1%), the Philippines (1.0%) and India (0.9%) (Table 6).

**Table 6: Children and young people aged 0 to 17 years by country of birth, number and per cent, WA, 2021**

	Number	Per cent
<b>Australia</b>	<b>509,464</b>	<b>84.9</b>
England	10,056	1.7
New Zealand	6,897	1.1
Philippines	5,745	1.0
India	5,285	0.9
South Africa	4,352	0.7
Malaysia	2,013	0.3
China (excludes SARs and Taiwan)	1,984	0.3
Thailand	1,728	0.3
United States of America	1,613	0.3
Other*	51,040	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>600,177</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, [Census TableBuilder: Dataset – Cultural Diversity](#)

Note: This table was prepared using the ABS Table Builder tool, which reports on unadjusted Census data.

As a result, the total in this table does not agree to the total for the Estimated Resident Population in 2021 in Table 1.

\* Other includes 25,979 children and young people whose country of birth was not stated.

According to Census 2021 data, the majority of WA children and young people speak English at home (77.4%). The most common other languages spoken at home are Indian and Chinese languages (around 3% and 2% respectively).<sup>12</sup>

12 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, [Census TableBuilder: 2021 Census – Cultural Diversity](#), ABS.

# Population

## Disability

The ABS estimates that in 2018, 43,600 WA children and young people aged 0 to 17 years had a reported disability (Table 7).<sup>13</sup> This represented 7.5 per cent of the total population of 0 to 17 year-olds in WA in 2018.

More than 1 in 10 (11.5%) children aged between 6 and 11 years had a reported disability.

**Table 7: Children and young people aged 0 to 17 years with disability by age group and disability status, number and per cent, WA, 2018**

	All with reported disability		Profound or severe core activity limitation**	
	Number	Per cent of children and young people in age group	Number	Per cent of children and young people in age group
0 to 5 years	9,000	4.4	4,600*	2.2
6 to 11 years	22,400	11.5	14,200	7.3
12 to 17 years	14,500	7.9	5,500	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,600</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>25,100</b>	<b>4.3</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021, *Persons with reported disability by specific age groups*, Custom report from the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2018 [unpublished]

\* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25 to 50 per cent and should be used with caution.

\*\* 'Profound or severe core activity limitation' indicates the person is unable to do, or always needs help with, a core activity task such as communication, mobility or self-care.

Note: Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. Discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

Across Australia, 69.9 per cent of 0 to five year-olds with disability have a sensory and speech disability (including loss of sight or hearing). In the 6 to 11 year-old age group, the most common disability types are intellectual (67.8%) and psychosocial (39.3%).<sup>14</sup>

13 The ABS notes that for the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, a person has a disability if they report they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities.

14 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021, *Persons with reported disability by specific age groups*, Custom report from the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2018, ABS [unpublished].

# Population

## Family composition

The most recent Census data report that there were 419,711 households with one or more children in WA in 2021.

Of these households, 262,249 (62.5%) were couple families with dependent children and 69,574 (16.6%) were single-parent families with dependent children (Table 8).

The majority of single parents in WA are female (79.9%).<sup>15</sup>

**Table 8: Families with children by family composition, number and per cent, WA, 2021**

	Couple families		Single-parent families		Total
	Number	Per cent of total	Number	Per cent of total	Number
With dependent children under 15 years*	221,403	52.8	55,163	13.1	<b>276,566</b>
With dependent children over 15 years and no children under 15 years	40,846	9.7	14,411	3.4	<b>55,257</b>
<b>Total with dependent children**</b>	<b>262,249</b>	<b>62.5</b>	<b>69,574</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>331,823</b>
With non-dependent children***	51,426	12.3	36,462	8.7	<b>87,888</b>
<b>Total families with children</b>	<b>313,675</b>	<b>74.7</b>	<b>106,036</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>419,711</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, *Census of Population and Housing 2021*, compiled using Table Builder – Dataset 2021 Census: Selected Family Characteristics

\* Includes families with children under 15 years and dependent children over 15 years.

\*\* Dependent children includes children under 15 years and dependent students aged 15 to 24 years.

\*\*\* This can include adult children (over 25 years) living with a parent.

15 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, ABS Census 2021, [Quick Stats, WA](#), ABS.





# Childcare and education

More than two-thirds of WA students are educated in government schools and almost one-third are educated in Catholic and independent schools.

## Childcare

About two in five (40.5%) WA children aged zero to five years attend government approved childcare services. This includes centre-based care, family day care and out-of-hours school care (as appropriate) (Table 9).

**Table 9: Number of children aged 0 to 5 years attending approved childcare services, WA, number and per cent, 2022.**

	Number	Per cent of all children
0 years old	3,223	9.7
1 years old	14,073	42.2
2 years old	18,601	55.2
3 years old	19,526	56.7
4 years old	16,186	46
5 years old	11,784	32.7
<b>Total 0 to 5 years</b>	<b>83,393</b>	<b>40.5</b>

Source: Productivity commission 2023, *Report on Government Services 2023: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Australian Government.

## Childcare and education

Proportion of children in the age group of zero to five years has been increasing marginally indicating a slight upward trend in the enrolment rate but this is much lower than across Australia (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Proportion of children aged 0 to 5 years attending approved childcare services, WA and Australia, per cent, 2018 to 2022.**



Source: Productivity commission 2023, [Report on Government Services 2023: Early Childhood Education and Care](#), Australian Government.

The data suggest that the percentage of children in formal care decreases as they grow older and start attending school (Table 10).

**Table 10: Number of children aged 0 to 12 years attending approved childcare services, WA and Australia, number and per cent, 2022**

	WA		Australia
	Number	Per cent of all children	Per cent of all children
0 to 5 years	83,393	40.5	48.2
6 to 12 years	39,860	15.8	19.8

Source: Productivity Commission 2023, [Report on Government Services 2023: Early Childhood Education and Care](#), Australian Government

## Childcare and education

A report by The Front Project, an organisation that promotes early childhood education and care (ECEC), reveals that regional WA faces a severe shortage of childcare services. The report, named 'Work and Play Report 2023', supports the conclusions of an earlier report by the Mitchell Institute in 2022 that childcare access is not equal in Australia. The report indicates that parents in regional or remote areas encounter more barriers to accessing childcare places than parents in metropolitan areas. Nearly 40 per cent of regional or remote parents who do not utilise paid ECEC services state that unavailability is a factor, while only 20 per cent of metropolitan parents report the same.<sup>16</sup>

Table 11 shows the average hours of attendance per week of children aged zero to 12 years at Australian Government approved childcare services by service type from 2019 to 2022. The service types are centre-based care, family day care, and outside school hours care (OSHC). The average hours of attendance have increased for all service types over the four years, except for OSHC, which remained the same. The highest increase was observed for centre-based care, followed by family day care. This suggests that more children are attending government approved childcare services for longer hours, especially in centre-based care and family day care settings.

**Table 11: Average hours of attendance per week of children aged 0 to 12 years at Australian Government CCS approved childcare services, by service type**

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Centre-based care	27.6	26.9	26.1	25.9
Family day care	25.8	24.5	23.6	23.5
OSHC	9.8	9.8	9.6	9.6

Source: Productivity Commission 2023, *Report on Government Services 2023: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Australian Government.

<sup>16</sup> The Front Project 2023 *Work and play: Understanding families experiences and perceptions of Early Childhood Education and Care*, [www.thefrontproject.org.au](http://www.thefrontproject.org.au).



# Childcare and education

## Education

There are 484,850 children and young people in WA enrolled in formal education. About two-thirds (66.4%) of the students attend government schools and one third (33.5%) attend Catholic and Independent schools (Table 12).

Approximately 6,500 children and young people in WA are home-schooled, which is almost a 50 per cent increase since 2019.

**Table 12: Students in government and non-government schools by year level, number and per cent, WA, Semester 1, 2023**

	Government		Non-government		Total
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	
Kindergarten	23,242	68.3	10,738	31.7	33,980
Pre-primary	25,694	74.0	9,050	26.0	34,744
Years 1 to 6	155,510	72.0	60,375	28.0	215,885
Years 7 to 12	117,848	58.9	82,393	41.9	200,241
<b>Total</b>	<b>322,294</b>	<b>66.4</b>	<b>162,556</b>	<b>33.5</b>	<b>484,850</b>

Source: Department of Education 2023, [Summary statistics of Schools and Full-time students](#).

## Childcare and education

In 2023, there were 830 government schools (826 in 2022) and 314 non-government schools (313 in 2022) operating in WA.<sup>17</sup>

80 per cent (389,601) of all students were enrolled in the metropolitan area and the remaining 20 per cent (97,305) were enrolled in regional and remote education regions, with a high proportion (9.2%) attending schools in the South West education region (Table 13).

**Table 13: Number of schools and primary and secondary students by education region, number and per cent, WA, Semester 1, 2023**

Education region	Schools	Primary*	Secondary	Total students	Proportion of all students	Change 2022 to 2023
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Per cent	Per cent
North metropolitan	362	109,040	82,079	191,119	39.4	1.7
South metropolitan	381	118,106	80,376	198,482	41.0	2.3
<b>Total metropolitan</b>	<b>743</b>	<b>227,146</b>	<b>162,455</b>	<b>389,601</b>	<b>80.4</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Goldfields	48	6,451	3,884	10,335	2.1	1.0
Kimberley	44	4,631	2,575	7,206	1.5	-0.4
Mid West	59	7,219	4,832	12,051	2.5	0.8
Pilbara	35	7,214	3,642	10,856	2.2	2.2
South West	139	25,442	19,283	44,725	9.2	1.4
Wheatbelt	76	6,506	3,570	10,076	2.1	0.0
<b>Total regional/remote</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>57,463</b>	<b>39,842</b>	<b>97,305</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,144</b>	<b>284,609</b>	<b>202,297</b>	<b>484,850</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1.8</b>

Source: WA Department of Education 2023, [Students by Education Region and Education Level](#)

\* Primary includes pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, pre-primary students and primary students.

Between Semester 2, 2022 and Semester 1, 2023, the number of school students enrolled in WA rose from 476,110 to 484,850, an increase of 1.8 per cent (Table 14).

Student numbers increased by 2 per cent in the metropolitan area while regional and remote education regions recorded a combined increase of 3.3 per cent. The South metropolitan region recorded the highest increase in student numbers of 2.3 per cent followed by Pilbara at 2.2 per cent while student numbers in the Wheatbelt remained the same.

There were 34,854 Aboriginal students enrolled in Semester 1 2023, representing 7.2 per cent of all students. There are significant differences across the regions, with Aboriginal students representing 66.4 per cent of students in the Kimberley region and 3.7 per cent of students in the North metropolitan education region (Table 14).

<sup>17</sup> WA Department of Education 2022, [Summary Statistics of Schools and Full-Time Students](#), Summary Statistics of Schools and Full-Time Students, WA Government.

## Childcare and education

**Table 14: Students by education region and Aboriginal status, number and per cent, WA, Semester 2 2022**

Education region	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Total
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	
North metropolitan	7,121	3.7	183,998	96.2	19,1119
South metropolitan	10,048	5.0	188,434	95.0	19,8482
<b>Total metropolitan</b>	<b>17,169</b>	<b>44.0</b>	<b>372,432</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>38,9601</b>
Goldfields	2,237	21.6	8,098	78.4	10,335
Kimberley	4,787	66.4	2,419	33.6	7,206
Mid West	3,048	25.3	9,003	74.7	12,051
Pilbara	3,140	29.0	7,716	71.0	10,856
South West	2,823	6.3	41,902	93.7	44,725
Wheatbelt	1,650	16.4	8,426	83.6	10,076
<b>Total regional/remote</b>	<b>17,685</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>77,564</b>	<b>81.4</b>	<b>95,249</b>
<b>All regions</b>	<b>34,854</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>449,996</b>	<b>92.8</b>	<b>484,850</b>

Source: WA Department of Education 2023, *Aboriginal students by Education Region and Education level*

Since 2011, there has been a 36.8 per cent increase in Aboriginal students across WA (2011: 25,487) compared to a 21.1 per cent increase in non-Aboriginal students (2011: 371,669).<sup>18</sup>

**Table 15: Children and young people registered to receive home education, WA, number and per cent, March 2016 to 2023**

	Number	Per cent change
<b>2015</b>	2,826	–
<b>2016</b>	3,303	16.9
<b>2017</b>	3,464	4.9
<b>2018</b>	3,563	2.9
<b>2019</b>	3,720	4.4
<b>2020</b>	4,116	10.6
<b>2021</b>	4,562	10.8
<b>2022</b>	6,151	34.8
<b>2023</b>	<b>6,466</b>	<b>4.9</b>

Source: WA Department of Education 2023, *Annual Report 2022–23*, WA Government and prior years' reports.

<sup>18</sup> Data calculated by the Commissioner for Children and Young People from WA Department of Education statistical reports.





# Vulnerability

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**Approximately 107,000 children and young people in WA are estimated to be living below the poverty line.**

## Child poverty

The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre estimates that in 2019–20, 16.6 per cent of children in WA were living in poverty (Table 16).<sup>19</sup> This equates to approximately 107,000 children and young people in WA aged 0 to 17 years who are living in poverty. The percentage of children living in poverty (16.6%) is higher than the percentage for any other age group.<sup>20</sup>

Census 2021 demonstrated that, while 80 per cent of all Australian single parent families are female, more than 95 per cent of the poorest single parent families who rely on income support payments are headed by women.

Overall, poverty rates for children and young people in WA are higher than in Australia as a whole.

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<sup>19</sup> Duncan A 2022, [Behind the Line: Poverty and disadvantage in Australia 2022](#), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on the States Series, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Duncan A 2022, [Behind the Line: Poverty and disadvantage in Australia 2022](#), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on the States Series, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, table 3.

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**Table 16: Poverty rates for children and young people by jurisdiction, per cent, Australia, 2019–20**

	Per cent
<b>NSW</b>	13.6
<b>VIC</b>	11.6
<b>QLD</b>	17.3
<b>SA</b>	13.2
<b>WA</b>	<b>16.6</b>
<b>TAS</b>	14.1
<b>NT*</b>	18.5
<b>ACT*</b>	8.6
<b>Australia</b>	<b>13.9</b>

Source: Duncan A 2022, [Behind the Line: Poverty and disadvantage in Australia 2022](#), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre

\* Due to smaller sample sizes, the ACT and NT were averaged over two years.

Note: Calculated based on 50 per cent of the Australian median disposable income (after housing costs) using the Melbourne Institute *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey*.

There is significant variation in poverty rates across WA. Analysis by NATSEM, the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, in 2015–16, estimated that 69.7 per cent of children and young people in the East Pilbara were living in poverty compared to 3.3 per cent of children and young people in the Perth suburb of City Beach.<sup>21</sup>

Researchers from the Australian National University (ANU) researched income differences within the Australian Aboriginal population, and between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. This study used data from the 2016 Census to conclude that 31.4 per cent of Aboriginal Australians were living in poverty and that those living in regional and remote areas were more likely to be experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.<sup>22</sup>

Children in single-parent families have a significantly higher risk of poverty than children living in couple families (28.9% compared to 7.4%).<sup>23</sup>

21 Miranti R et al. 2018, [Child Social Exclusion, Poverty And Disadvantage In Australia](#), Table Appendix 2 – Child Social Exclusion and Child Poverty, Table A6. Child Social Exclusion and Child Poverty, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), University of Canberra.

22 Markham F and Biddle N 2018, [Income, Poverty and Inequality: 2016 Census Paper No. 2](#), Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, p. 16.

23 Duncan A 2022, [Behind the Line: Poverty and disadvantage in Australia 2022](#), Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Focus on the States Series, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, p. 26.

## Housing and homelessness

On 30 June 2023, 11,744 children and young people were on the public housing wait list. This makes the number marginally higher than in 2022 (11,461).

In 2021–22, 6,802 children and young people aged zero to 17 years presented at WA specialist homelessness services alone or with their families (7,102 in 2020–21). The majority (4,117) were under 10 years of age.<sup>24</sup>

The single most common reason for children and young people to need housing and homelessness assistance is family and domestic violence.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 17: Children and young people aged 0 to 17 years on public housing wait list by number of applications and applicants, number and per cent, WA, 2016 to 2022**

	Total applicants (all ages)	Applicants (0 to 17 years)	Proportion of all applicants	Applications (0 to 17 years)
	Number	Number	Per cent	Number
30 June 2016	36,167	11,963	33.1	6,058
30 June 2017	29,544	9,070	30.7	4,532
30 June 2018	23,637	6,892	29.2	3,311
30 June 2019	23,254	6,824	29.3	3,325
30 June 2020	24,364	7,469	30.7	3,669
30 June 2021	29,720	9,934	33.4	4,975
30 June 2022	33,563	11,461	34.1	5,752
<b>30 June 2023</b>	<b>33,986</b>	<b>11,744</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>5,960</b>

Source: Department of Communities (Housing), *Public Housing Wait List as at 30 June 2023* custom report and previous years reports [unpublished]

Note: Children and young people under 18 are considered applicants when their parent(s) or guardians are applying for housing to accommodate them. In a small number of cases the young person (aged 16 to 17 years) can be applying in their own right.

24 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2022, [Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2021–22](#), Table Clients.1: Clients and support periods, by age and sex, 2021–22, AIHW.

25 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2022, [Specialist Homelessness Services Collection data cubes 2011–12 to 2021–22](#), SHSC Demographics data cube, AIHW.

# Vulnerability

On average, households waited 133 weeks (more than two years) to be housed (102 weeks in 2020–21 and 116 weeks in 2021–22).<sup>26</sup> This represents a further substantial increase in the average time on the waiting list.

The Department of Communities' Housing Authority notes that increased waiting times in 2022–23 were impacted by an increase in the number of applicants and external factors such as labour and material shortages which reduced the turnover of vacant housing.<sup>27</sup>

More than one quarter (28.2%) of WA households live in a rented dwelling.<sup>28</sup> This proportion has not changed materially for 25 years.

According to the Australian Census, in 2021 at least 2,058 WA children and young people were homeless (Table 18).<sup>29</sup> This figure is known to be underestimated due to the often-hidden nature of youth homelessness.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 18: Children and young people aged 0 to 18 years reported as homeless by age group and gender, number, WA, 2021**

	0 to 11 years	12 to 18 years	Total
Male	590	394	984
Female	560	455	1,015
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>2,058</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, Table 4.6 Homeless Operational Groups and Other Marginal Housing, Western Australia–Sex by age of person–2016

Note: Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. As a result, cells may not add to the totals.

26 Department of Communities 2022, *Housing Authority 2022–23 Annual Report*, WA Government, p.208.

27 Ibid.

28 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, *Housing Occupancy and Costs: 2019–20*, Table 12.15 Household Estimates, Selected household characteristics, Western Australia, 1994–95 to 2019–20, ABS.

29 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2023, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness. 2021*, Homelessness Operational Groups and other Marginal Housing, Western Australia–Sex by age of person–2021, ABS.

30 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2020, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness. 2016*, Youth homelessness, ABS.



## Developmental vulnerability

According to the 2021 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC),<sup>31</sup> 6,852 WA children were assessed as vulnerable on one or more developmental domains upon entering primary school.<sup>32</sup> This represents 20.3 per cent of children assessed in 2021, which is a slight increase from the results for 2018 (19.4%).

The proportion of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains is lower in WA (20.3%) than in Australia overall (22.0%) (Table 19).

**Table 19: Children assessed as developmentally vulnerable, number and per cent, WA and Australia, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018 and 2021**

	WA				Australia	
	One or more domains		Two or more domains		One or more	Two or more
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent
<b>2009</b>	6,445	24.7	3,177	12.2	23.6	11.8
<b>2012</b>	7,048	23.0	3,449	11.2	22.0	10.8
<b>2015</b>	6,895	21.3	3,403	10.5	22.0	11.1
<b>2018</b>	6,369	19.4	3,086	9.4	21.7	11.0
<b>2021</b>	6,852	20.3	3,457	10.2	22.0	11.4

Source: Australian Early Development Census, [2021 AEDC National Report Appendix 2: State and Territory trends, all collections \(data tables\)](#)

The proportion of WA children who are developmentally on track across all five domains is 57.5 per cent (46.5% in 2009).<sup>33</sup>

Aboriginal children are less likely to be developmentally on track than non-Aboriginal children. Under the Closing the Gap initiative, a national target has been set for 55 per cent of Aboriginal children to be assessed as developmentally on track in all domains by 2031.<sup>34</sup>

31 The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) measures the development of children in Australia in their first year of full-time school. Data is collected using an adapted version of the Early Development Instrument, which consists of approximately 100 questions closely linked to child health, education and social outcomes across five key domains (physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge). Children receive a score between 0 and 10 for each domain and children falling below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile are categorised as 'developmentally vulnerable'. AEDC scores are calculated for each domain for each individual child where enough valid responses have been recorded.

32 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2022, [Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021](#), AEDC.

33 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2022, [2021 AEDC National Report Appendix 2: State and Territory trends, all collections \(data tables\)](#), AEDC.

34 Productivity Commission 2022, [Closing the Gap Targets, Outcome 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years](#), Australian Government [website].

## Vulnerability

In 2021, only 31.3 per cent of Aboriginal children in WA were assessed as being developmentally on track in all five AEDC domains. This represents no change from 2018 (31.4%) but does represent an improvement since 2009 (21.1%).

Aboriginal children in very remote areas are much less likely to be developmentally on track than Aboriginal children in other areas (very remote: 18.6% developmentally on track; metropolitan area: 35.1% developmentally on track).

This is consistent with the results across WA, with one-quarter (24.2%) of children living in very remote areas being developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains compared to 9.4 per cent of children who live in the metropolitan area.<sup>35</sup> The proportion of developmentally vulnerable children in very remote areas has increased since 2009 (22.9% to 24.2%), while the proportion of children developmentally vulnerable across all other areas has generally decreased since 2009 (e.g. metropolitan area: 11.4% to 9.4%).<sup>36</sup>



35 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) 2022, [Public table by Remoteness 2009 – 2021](#), AEDC.

36 Ibid.

## Children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains – regional WA (2021)

The Kimberley region has the highest proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains. Around one in four students in the Kimberley (24.3%) were assessed as being vulnerable on two or more domains in 2021. This is an improvement from prior years' results (2015: 28.5%; 2018: 26.5%).

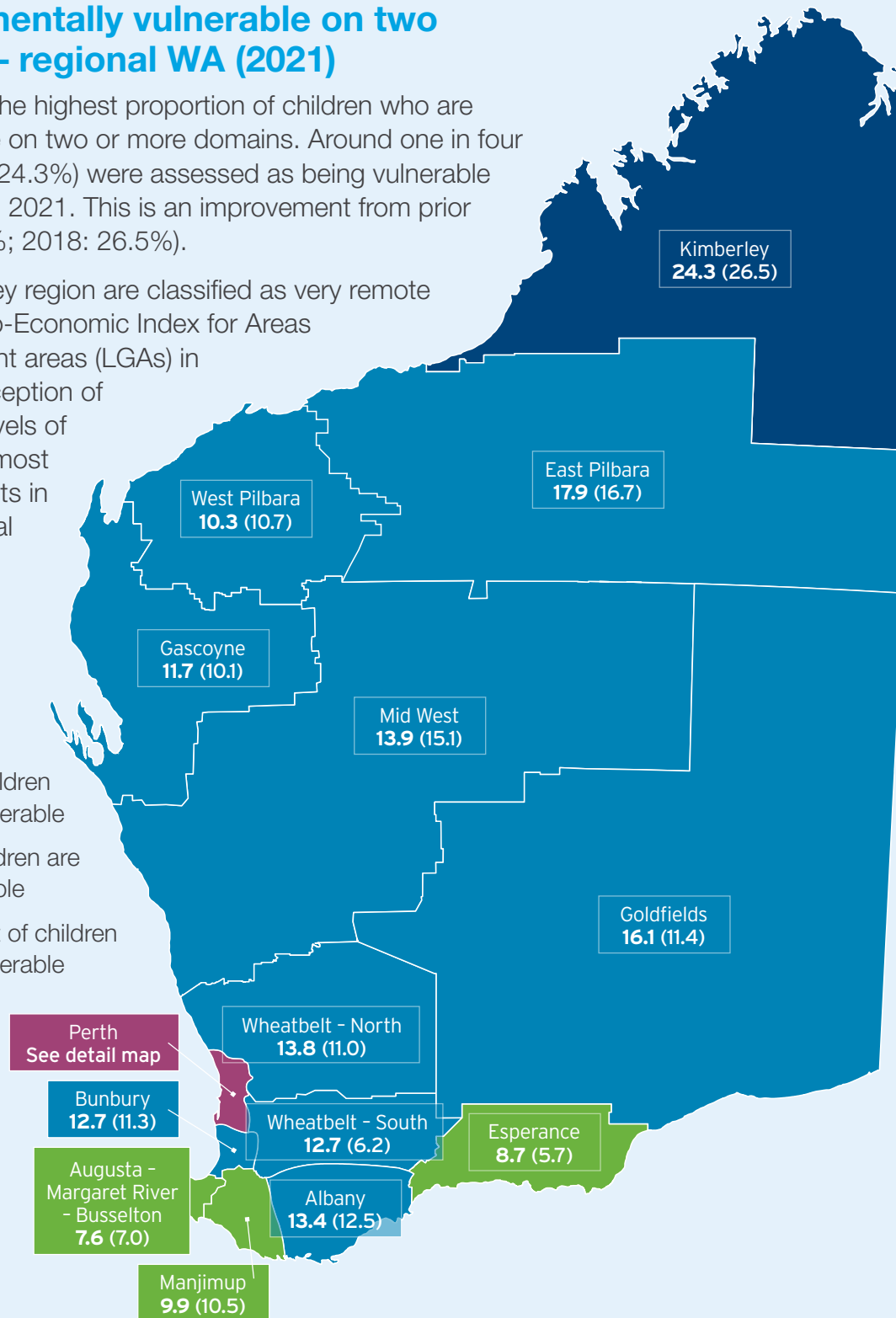
Large parts of the Kimberley region are classified as very remote and according to the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), all local government areas (LGAs) in the Kimberley (with the exception of Broome LGA) have high levels of disadvantage.<sup>37</sup> Further, almost two-thirds of school entrants in the Kimberley are Aboriginal (see Education chapter) and they are more likely to experience poverty and disadvantage than non-Aboriginal children.<sup>38</sup>

- Below 10 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable
- 10 to 20 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable
- Greater than 20 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable

( ) Data in brackets is 2018 result

Source: Australian Early Development Census 2022, [Public table by Statistical Area Level \(SA3\) 2009–2021](#)

\* Data for Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands is not included due to the relatively small number of children with valid scores.



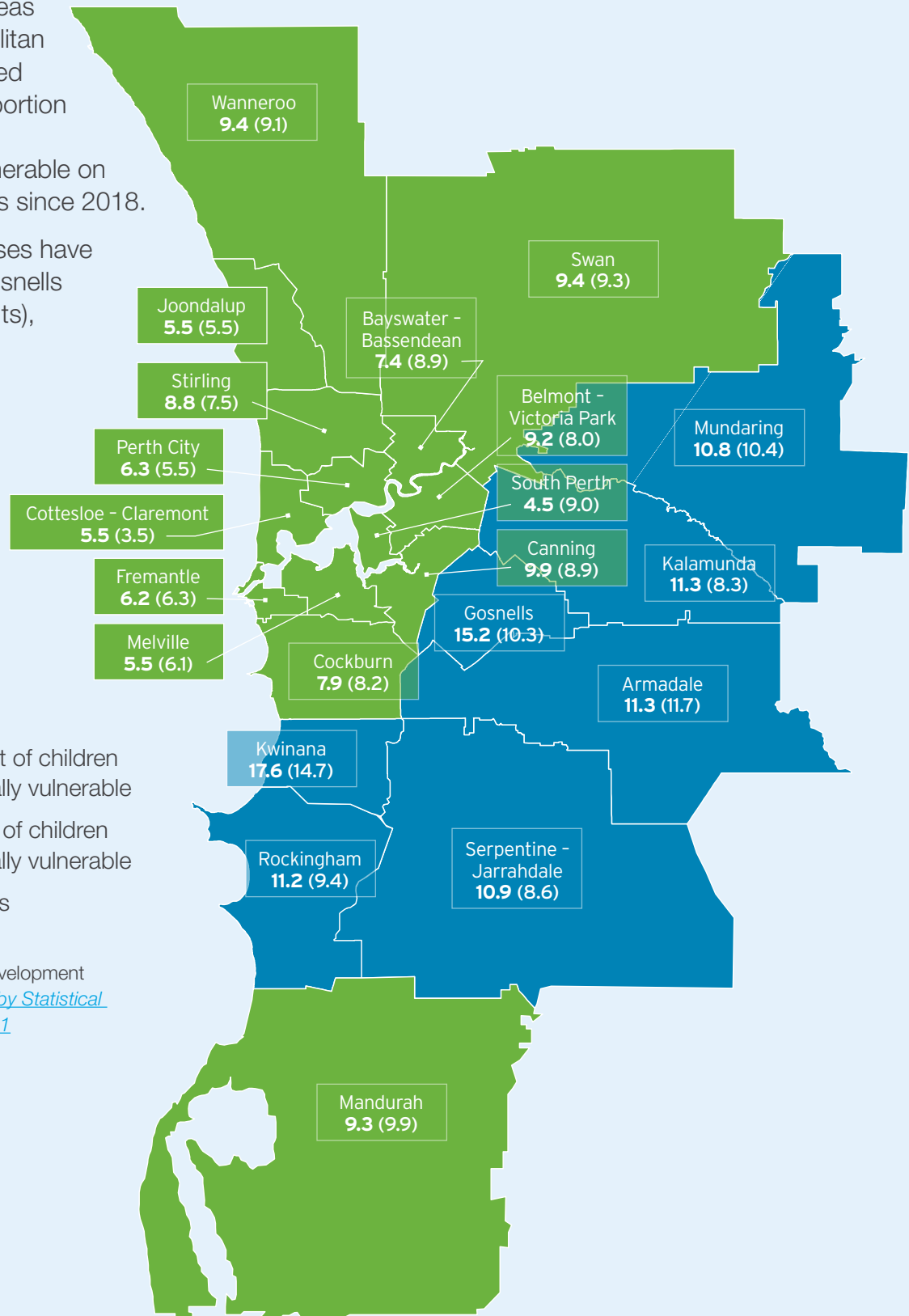
37 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018, [Socio-Economic Indexes for Australia \(SEIFA\), 2021](#), Table 1 Local Government Area (LGA) SEIFA Summary, 2021, ABS.

38 Markham F and Biddle N 2018, [Income, Poverty and Inequality: 2016 Census Paper No. 2](#), Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, p. 16.

## Children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains – metropolitan area (2021)

A number of local areas in the Perth metropolitan area have experienced increases in the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains since 2018.

Most notably, increases have been recorded in Gosnells (4.9 percentage points), Kalamunda (3.0 percentage points) and Kwinana (2.9 percentage points).



Below 10 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable

10 to 20 per cent of children are developmentally vulnerable

( ) Data in brackets is 2018 result

Source: Australian Early Development Census 2022, [Public table by Statistical Area Level \(SA3\) 2009–2021](#)



## Children and young people in child protection system

Aboriginal children and young people continue to be over-represented in the child protection system and it is increasing annually. The Closing the Gap target is to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031. The continued growth in WA of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care puts this target at significant risk.

On 30 June 2023, there were 5,174 children and young people in out-of-home care in WA, more than half of whom (59.3%) were Aboriginal. This is a significant increase from 30 June 2013 when 3,972 children and young people were in out-of-home care, 49.0 per cent of whom were Aboriginal.

From 30 June 2022 to 30 June 2023, the total number of children and young people in care increased by 81, or 1.6 per cent (Table 20). Over this period, the number of Aboriginal children and young people in care increased by 3.8 per cent and the number of non-Aboriginal children and young people in care decreased by 1.5 per cent in the same period. However, in the 10 years from 30 June 2013 to 30 June 2023, the total increase of children and young people in out-of-home care was 1,202. Of the 1,202 children and young people, 1,122 were Aboriginal and 80 were non-Aboriginal.

**Table 20: Children and young people in out-of-home care by age group and Aboriginal status, number, WA, 30 June 2022 and 30 June 2023**

	30 June 2023			30 June 2022		
	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Total	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Total
Less than 1 year	104	55	<b>159</b>	91	48	<b>139</b>
1 to 4 years	569	347	<b>916</b>	582	359	<b>941</b>
5 to 9 years	926	558	<b>1484</b>	887	572	<b>1,459</b>
10 to 14 years	955	672	<b>1627</b>	920	709	<b>1,629</b>
15 years and older	514	474	<b>988</b>	475	450	<b>925</b>
<b>Total children and young people in care</b>	<b>3,068</b>	<b>2,106</b>	<b>5,174</b>	<b>2,955</b>	<b>2,138</b>	<b>5,093</b>
Per cent of total	59.3%	40.7%	<b>100.0%</b>	58.0%	42.0%	<b>100.0%</b>

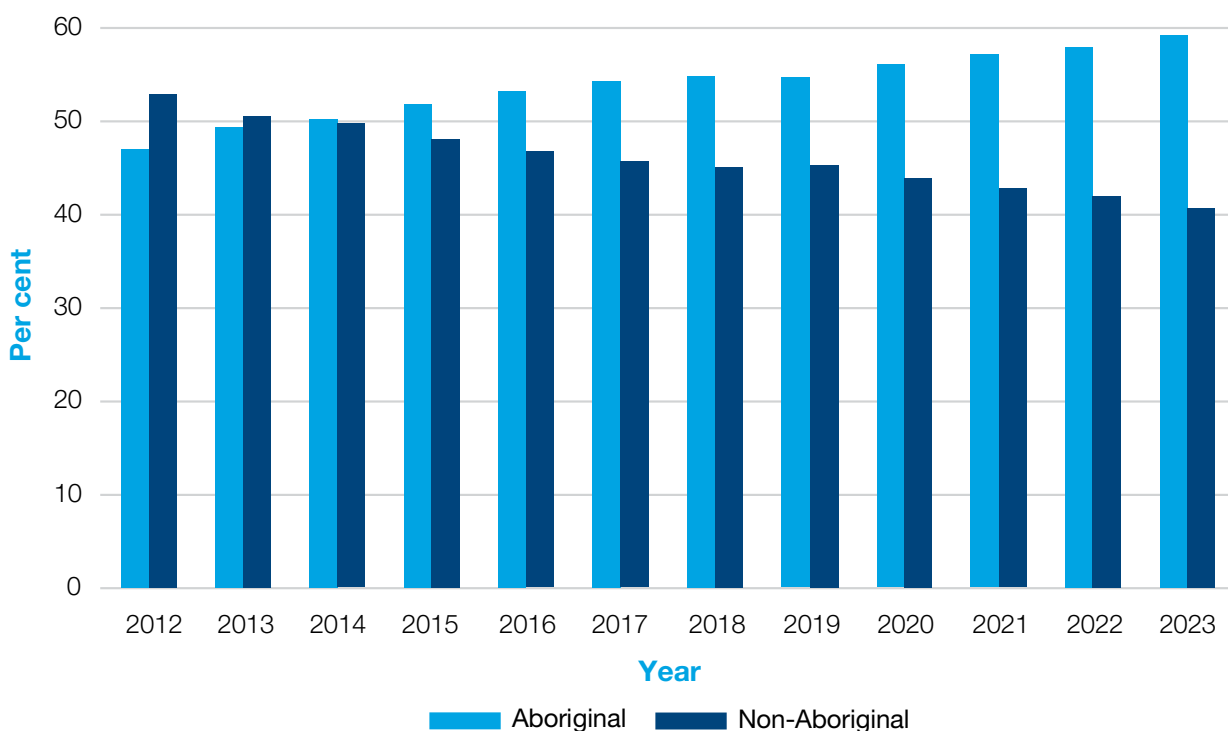
Source: Department of Communities 2023, [Child Protection Activity Performance Report 2022–23](#)

## Vulnerability

The proportion of children and young people in out-of-home care in WA who are Aboriginal has increased from 49.0 per cent in 2012 to 59.3 per cent in 2023 (Figure 4).

Despite significant focus on the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care in recent years, the proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care is steadily increasing, while the proportion of non-Aboriginal children and young people is decreasing (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Proportion of Children and young people in out of home care by Aboriginal status, per cent, WA, 30 June 2012 to 30 June 2023**



Source: Department of Communities (and previously Department of Child Protection), Annual Reports from [2016–17](#) to [2022–2023](#)

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) publishes the **Child Protection Australia** report annually. This report provides detailed data from state and territory child protection agencies, including rates of children and young people being placed in out-of-home care.

In June 2022, Aboriginal children and young people in WA were 20 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children and young people (61.6 per 1,000 compared to 3.1 per 1,000).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2023, [Child Protection Australia, 2021–22](#), Table S5.10: Children in out-of-home care, by Indigenous status and state or territory, 30 June 2022, AIHW.

## Children and young people in the youth justice system

On an average day<sup>40</sup> in 2021–22, there were 490 children and young people aged 10 to 17 years under youth justice supervision in WA, with the majority (385 or 78.6%) being supervised in the community.

The number of children and young people under supervision in the youth justice system decreased from 2019–20 to 2020–21, mainly due to the reduction in the number of children and young people under youth justice supervision in the community (Table 21). However, this trend reversed in 2021–22, when the number of children under supervision increased to 490 (Ibid).

**Table 21: Children and young people aged 10 to 17 years under youth justice supervision in the community or detention on an average day, number and per cent, WA, 2019–20 to 2021–22**

	2021–22		2020–21		2019–20	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Community	385.8	78.6	360	79.5	501	83.5
Detention*	105.0	21.4	96	21.2	104	17.3
<b>Total**</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Youth Justice in Australia 2021–22](#), Table S34a: Young people under community-based supervision on an average day, by age, states and territories, and Table S72a: Young people in detention on an average day by age, states and territories

\* Children and young people in detention are either held in Banksia Hill Detention Centre in Canning Vale, which is WA's only youth detention facility, or as of 2022 in Unit 18 of Casuarina Prison (the maximum-security prison for adult males which was gazetted as a juvenile facility).

\*\* The number of young people on an average day may not sum due to rounding, and because some young people may have been moved between community-based supervision and detention on the same day. Caution is to be applied when interpreting trends among small populations such as these.

40 The 'average day' measure is calculated by summing the number of days each young person spends under supervision during the financial year and dividing this by the total number of days in the year. It reflects the number under supervision on any given day during the year and indicates the average number of young people supported by the supervision system at any time. This summary measure reflects both the number of young people supervised, and the amount of time they spent under supervision. Source: AIHW 2019, [Youth Justice in Australia 2017–18](#), p.44, AIHW.

## Vulnerability

The Department of Justice reports that in 2022–2023 there was a decrease in the number of children and young people in detention (either as a result of being under arrest, on remand or having been sentenced) on an average day, from 114 in 2021–22 to 94 in 2022–23.<sup>41</sup>

More than half (60.6%) of children and young people in detention on an average day in 2022–2023 were unsentenced.<sup>42</sup>

In 2021–22, Aboriginal children and young people were around 45 times more likely than non-Aboriginal children to be held in youth detention (2020–21: 43 times) (Table 22). The Closing the Gap target, to reduce the rate of Aboriginal children and young people in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031 would appear to be severely at risk given the trends in recent years.

**Table 22: Children and young people aged 10 to 17 under community-based supervision or detention on an average day of Aboriginal status, number and rate, WA, 2021–2022**

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Total		Rate Ratio Aboriginal/ Non-Aboriginal
	Number	Rate**	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	
Community	231.9	129.0	153.9	5.9	<b>385.8</b>	<b>13.8</b>	21.9
Detention	80.2	44.6	24.7	0.9	<b>105.0</b>	<b>3.8</b>	44.6
<b>Total*</b>	<b>309.2</b>	<b>172.0</b>	<b>177.2</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>486.4</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>25.3</b>

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Youth Justice in Australia 2021–22](#)

- Table S133b: Young people under community-based supervision on an average day by age, sex and Indigenous status, Western Australia, 2017–18 to 2021–22
- Table S133c: Young people in detention on an average day<sup>(a)</sup> by age, sex and Indigenous status, Western Australia, 2017–18 to 2021–22
- Table S86a: Young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average day by sex, states and territories, 2012–13 to 2021–22 (rate)
- Table S89: Young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average day by sex and Indigenous status, states and territories, 2017–18 to 2021–22 (rate)
- Table S37a: Young people aged 10-17 under community-based supervision on an average day by sex and Indigenous status, states and territories, 2021–22 (rate).

\* Rates of young people on an average day may not sum up to total due to rounding.

\*\* Rates are number of young people per 10,000 relevant population.

41 Department of Justice 2022, [Annual Report 2022–23](#), WA Government, p.35. The data from AIHW and the Department of Justice for children and young people in Banksia Hill are marginally different.

42 Department of Justice 2022, [Annual Report 2022–23](#), WA Government, p.34.



# Vulnerability

According to latest release by AIHW, 'Youth detention population in Australia 2023', in the June quarter of 2023, there were 82 young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average night. This reflects a decrease from 100 in the June quarter of 2020.

**Table 23: Young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average night, number, WA, from June quarter 2020 to June quarter 2023**

Date	Number in detention
2020	99.7
2021	95.7
2022	100.3
2023	<b>82.3</b>

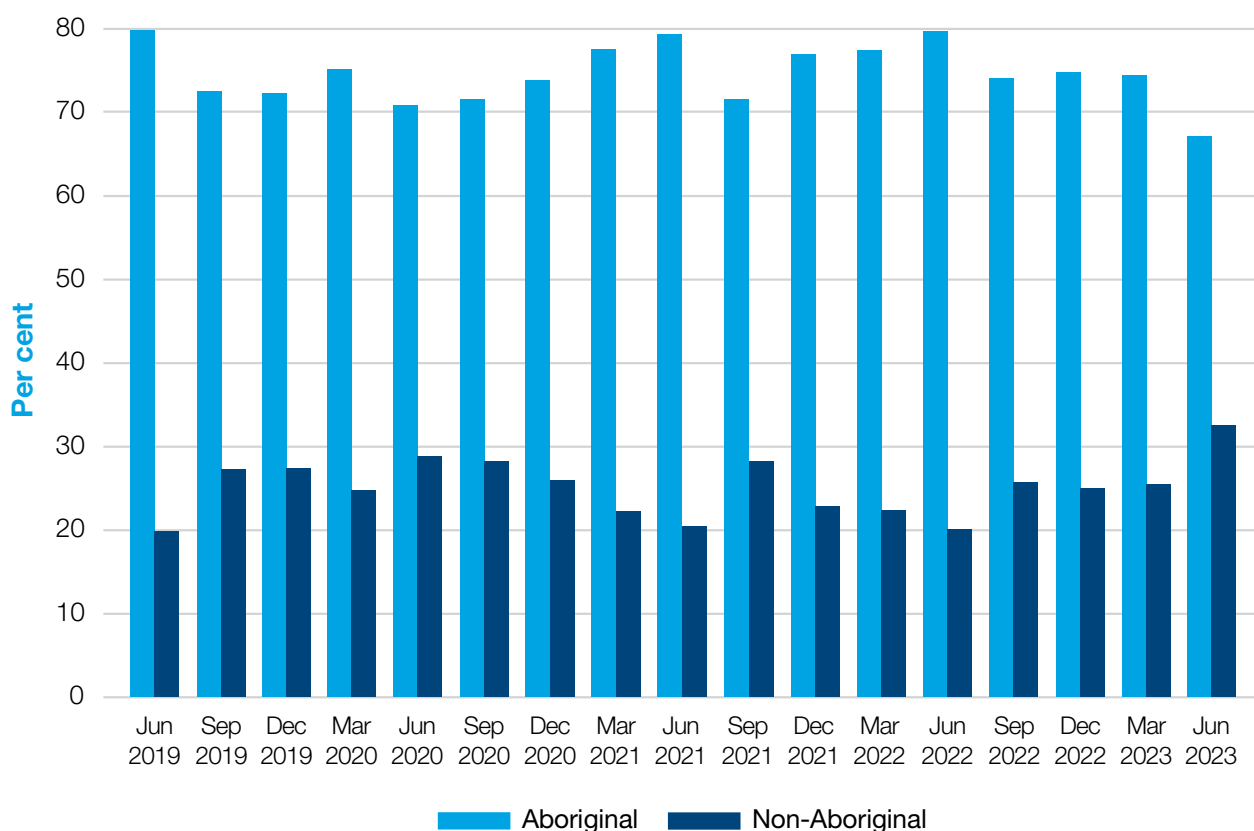
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Youth detention population in Australia 2023](#), Table S14: Young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average night by sex, states and territories, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023



## Vulnerability

Over the past four years, there has been a notable decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal children in detention. In the June quarter of 2019, they accounted for 80.1 per cent, while in the June quarter of 2023, the proportion had reduced to 67.3 per cent. Despite this decline, it's worth noting that the number of Aboriginal children in detention was consistently higher than non-Aboriginal children during this period (Figure 5).<sup>43</sup>

**Figure 5: Proportion of children and young people aged 10 to 17 years in detention on an average night by Aboriginal status, per cent, WA June 2019 to June 2023 (quarterly)**



<sup>43</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Youth detention population in Australia 2023](#), Table S4: First Nations young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average night by sex, states and territories, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023

Table S9: Non-Indigenous young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average night by sex, states and territories, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023, AIHW.

## Vulnerability

Of the 82 children and young people held in detention in WA over the June quarter of 2023, five children and young people aged were between 10 and 13 years.<sup>44</sup> Of these, most were Aboriginal children and young people (Table 24).

**Table 24: Children and young people aged 10 to 17 years held in detention on an average night by age and Aboriginal status, number, WA, June quarter 2023.**

	10 to 13 years	14 to 17 years	Total
Aboriginal	3.3	52.1	<b>55.4</b>
Non-Aboriginal	2.1	24.8	<b>26.9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>76.9</b>	<b>82.3</b>

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Youth detention population in Australia 2023](#).

Notes:

1. Total includes young people with unknown sex.
2. Trend data may differ from those previously published due to data revisions.
3. The number of young people on an average night may not sum to total due to rounding.

On an average night during the June quarter of 2023, 27 of the 82 children and young people aged 10-17 in detention were sentenced.<sup>45</sup>

Female children and young people were significantly less likely to be under youth justice supervision than male children and young people. On an average day in 2021–22, 20.7 per cent of children and young people under community supervision and 12.1 per cent of children and young people in detention were female.<sup>46</sup>

There is a clear interaction between the child protection system and the youth justice system. Half (49.7%) of children and young people in the WA youth justice system during 2020–21 had also had an interaction with the child protection system in the previous five years.<sup>47</sup>

44 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Youth Justice in Australia 2021–22](#), Table S14: Young people aged 10-17 in detention on an average night by sex, states and territories, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023, AIHW. Table S12: Young people aged 10–13 in detention on an average night by sex, states and territories, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023.

45 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2022, [Youth detention population in Australia 2023](#), Table S50: Young people aged 10-17 in sentenced detention on an average night by sex, states and territories, June quarter 2019 to June quarter 2023.

46 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2022, [Youth Justice in Australia 2021–22](#), Table S133b and c: Young people under community-based supervision and detention on an average day by age, sex and Indigenous status, Western Australia, 2017–18 to 2021–22, AIHW.

47 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2022, [Young people under youth justice supervision and their interaction with the child protection system 2020–21](#), AIHW. Table S2: Young people who had been under youth justice supervision in 2020–21 and who had an interaction with the child protection system in the 5 years from 1 July 2016 – 30 June 2021, by state and territory, by Indigenous status, by sex (number, %).









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All photographs featured in this publication are of Western Australian children and young people and have been taken by or for the Commissioner for Children and Young People.