

Video transcript: Kinship Care

Audit objective

In this audit, we assessed if the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) is providing timely, stable and quality placements for children and young people through its new kinship care model.

Who we examined

We examined the department and 3 other agencies that provide kinship care services: Anglicare Victoria, Uniting Vic.Tas and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

What we concluded

We found that the department doesn't know if it's providing safe and timely placements for children at risk because it doesn't monitor or report on the new model's outcomes.

It also doesn't monitor if staff and its service providers complete placement assessments. This puts children at risk because the department can't confirm if they're being cared for in a safe environment.

Additionally, kinship carers aren't receiving the level of support from the department they need to provide stable homes.

Background information

Kinship care is when a child who can't live with their parents is placed in a relative or family friend's home.

Kinship care is the fastest-growing form of out-of-home care in Victoria. Between 2017 and 2021, the number of children in kinship care grew by 33 per cent.

The department introduced the new kinship care model in 2018 to address the increased demand and issues about support for carers.

Issue 1: Making sure homes are safe

When a child goes into a kinship placement, the department and, where relevant, service providers do assessments to:

- check if the placement is safe
- understand the carer's needs
- and annually check the child's wellbeing.

However, our review of the department's data found that between 2018 to 2020, it only completed:

- 86 per cent of safety checks
- 44 per cent of carer need assessments
- and 15 per cent of annual wellbeing checks.

Additionally, it only did:

- 14 per cent of completed safety checks on time
- 2 per cent of completed carer checks on time
- and 1 per cent of completed wellbeing checks on time.

This means the department doesn't know if it's putting children in safe, stable homes.

Issue 2: Supporting carers

Kinship carers have trouble accessing financial support. In a survey done by the department in 2021, 53 per cent of kinship carers said they didn't feel supported by the department.

We also found that 96 per cent of kinship carers get the lowest level of care allowance compared to 32 per cent of foster carers.

This means that many carers are either partially or completely missing out on the support they need to look after the children in their care.

What we recommended

We made 12 recommendations to the department, including:

- 6 about identifying kinship networks early
- one about completing mandatory assessments
- 2 about support for carers
- and 3 about measuring and reporting on the new model.

More information

For more information, or to read our full report, please go to audit.vic.gov.au

To access the complete video, please go to <https://youtu.be/WGUyY2aUPi0>