



SACOSS

South Australian Council
of Social Service

You can! help create a better State

SACOSS Fact Sheet No. 1: Child Protection

In the lead-up to the 2010 South Australian state election, political parties, independent candidates and interest groups are all constructing their policy platforms in an attempt to entice you: the voter. SACOSS asks that you use your position of power to Help Create a Better State – find out the facts, read beyond the headlines, and make *people* the foundation of policy in South Australia.

A fully functioning and effective child protection system is vital for the protection of our most vulnerable and at risk children. Unfortunately, South Australia's child protection system is struggling to cope with a series of significant challenges: increased demand for services, a greater need for alternative care arrangements, a lack of appropriate training for social workers, too few experienced workers in the field, and rapidly declining numbers of foster carers. It is time for change in South Australia's child protection system, to ensure it can better meet these challenges and do exactly what its name suggests – protect South Australian children.

The Current State...

1. Cost across Australia — In 2006-07 approximately \$1.7 billion was spent on the child protection system across the country.

2. Abuse & neglect in SA — In South Australia in 2007-08 there were a total of 20,847 child abuse/neglect notifications. 5,437 investigations were completed; of these, 2,331 were substantiated cases and 3,106 notifications were not substantiated.

3. Rising notifications — Children born in the last seven years are increasingly more likely to be brought to the attention of Families SA through a notification. Research has estimated that four years after birth, the percentage of children with a notification is 4% of those born in 1991, 7.5% of children born in 1998, and 11% of children born in 2002.

3. Out-of-home care — In 2008 there were 1,841 children and young people living away from their parents in South Australia. Unfortunately, research has found that over half of all children and young people in care experience one or more psychiatric disorders during their time in care.

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — Research has found that in South Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are more likely to be the subject of a child protection notification, investigation and substantiation, to be the subject of more serious notifications of abuse, to be the subject of emotional abuse and neglect notifications, to have a first notification at a younger age, and to be the subject of multiple notifications.

5. Lifelong impacts — Abuse and/or neglect that takes place early in a child's life will have a profoundly negative, long-term impact on their health, wellbeing, ability to cope with stress, behaviour and ability to learn. Unfortunately, it is within the crucial and delicate first 3-4 years of a child's life that more children are being introduced into the child protection system.

...a Better State

1. Early intervention and prevention — Switch to a public health model of child protection, placing an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. This means focusing on the health of populations, not just the health of individuals, which gives us the opportunity to address the social conditions that lead to child abuse/neglect.

2. Focus on connectedness — Provide support and services in a way that recognises the connections between individuals, families and children. This will encourage participation, information exchange, knowledge-building, and access to services within families, for the benefit of children and young people.

3. State health and wellbeing framework — Develop a framework that guides best practice and joined-up service from birth to 18 years of age. This will enable measurements at set points in a child's development to determine any needs or issues. This should be complemented by the introduction of children's rights legislation; for example, banning any and all physical violence against children.

4. Targeted program development — Build capacity across Health, Education and non-government services to assess and manage risks for children and families where child protection issues are prevalent. This could include the placement of Families SA personnel within these services to assist frontline staff to identify and support children and families at risk, without the need to be referred and investigated through the formal child protection system.

5. Multi-level responses — Ensure responses to families under stress or instances of child abuse/neglect are connected and coordinated, including all levels of government and the community sector. Responses should aim for integrated local solutions, using a "place-based" approach to connect all appropriate and available resources and personnel of both adult and child-focused services.

(You can) Help create a better State

- Get up to speed – read the SACOSS Child Protection Principles Paper.
- Ask your local MP about child protection, and tell them what you think.
- Ask your local candidates what their election policies will include, and tell them what you think.
- Read about the positions of a range of interest groups, and contact them for further information.

REMEMBER that political parties and candidates respond to public opinion – it is our strongest weapon to ensure progressive and equitable policies!

Other Groups to Contact

Office of the Guardian
www.gcyp.sa.gov.au
(08) 8226 8570

CREATE Foundation
www.create.org.au
(08) 8226 1366

Grandparents for Grandchildren
<http://www.communitywebs.org/GrandparentsforGrandchildren>
(08) 8226 3386

Child and Family Welfare Association
<http://www.cafwaa.org.au/>
(02) 9281 8822