

# Protecting Australia's children research audit (1995–2010)

Final report

**MYFANWY McDONALD, DARYL HIGGINS,  
KYLIE VALENTINE and ALISTER LAMONT**

Australian Institute of Family Studies and Social Policy Research Centre

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**Australian Government**

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## Authors

At the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Dr Myfanwy McDonald is a Senior Research Officer, Dr Daryl Higgins is the Deputy Director (Research) and Alister Lamont is a Research Officer. At the Social Policy Research Centre, Dr kyliE valentine is a Senior Research Fellow.



# Executive summary

The purpose of this audit is to identify, describe and disseminate information about Australian research projects (including program evaluations) undertaken during the 1995–2010 period on topics relating to the protection of children. This audit covers a broad scope of topics, ranging from universal preventative initiatives through to statutory child protection and out-of-home care. The scope of the topics for the audit reflects the six supporting outcomes outlined in the report *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (“National Framework”; Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009b).

The specific aims of the audit, in keeping with the aims of two previous audits on similar topics (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004; Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, Richardson, & Aldana, 2005), were to identify:

- research projects (published and unpublished) undertaken in Australia between the 1995–2010 period on topics of relevance to the National Framework (COAG, 2009b);
- outcomes and progress since the *Audit of Australian Out-of-Home Care Research* (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004) and the *National Audit of Australian Child Protection Research 1995–2004* (Higgins et al., 2005);
- gaps, duplication and areas for development in relation to the outcomes and national priorities identified in the National Framework; and
- priorities for future research and data collection on the basis of the audit results, outcomes of the Towards a National Agenda forum (October 2009) and priorities identified in the National Framework.

Building upon the methodology employed by Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) and Higgins et al. (2005), this audit asked researchers working in relevant fields to submit information via an online audit form about projects they have been, or are currently, undertaking. However, in recognition of the limitations of this approach as a means of providing a comprehensive picture of the research field, and in order to ensure we captured as many projects as possible, we also conducted a literature search to identify research projects that met the audit criteria.

In keeping with the approach of the Higgins et al. (2005) audit, the following types of projects were excluded:

- literature reviews, unless they were systematic literature reviews or research audits;
- program descriptions where there were no evaluation components per se; and
- process evaluations or quality assurance procedures where the impact or outcomes of the program were not assessed.

Furthermore, in order to effectively manage the scope of the audit, detailed inclusion criteria were developed, based upon the key issues highlighted in the National Framework.

In total, 1,359 research projects that met the audit criteria were identified. Analysis of available information about these projects showed that just over half addressed issues specifically relating to child abuse and neglect and just over a quarter related to out-of-home care.

Overall, a much larger proportion of projects focused upon child abuse and neglect after it had occurred and statutory services (i.e., supporting outcome 4 of the National Framework), compared

to the proportion that addressed issues relating to prevention and early intervention (i.e., supporting outcomes 1, 2 and 3).

Projects focusing upon sexual abuse were more common than projects that focused upon family violence (as a form of maltreatment), and much more common than projects that focused upon physical abuse, neglect and psychological maltreatment.

As Cashmore and Ainsworth found in 2004, foster care continues to be an area that receives more attention in research than other types of out-of-home care, such as kinship and residential care. Outcomes for children in out-of-home care is a common topic for out-of-home care research, while topics relating to permanency planning (e.g., reunification, adoption from care) constitute only a small proportion overall of this area of research.

Although the proportion of projects focusing upon issues relating to Indigenous Australians has increased over the past 16 years, very few of those projects focus upon issues such as Indigenous community-led solutions to child welfare issues or partnerships between Indigenous communities and government/services. There is some indication that out-of-home care research is more likely than child abuse and neglect research to address issues relating to Indigenous Australians. Very few projects focus on issues relating to disabled children, adolescents and families from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

While detailed information about methodological approaches for these projects was not always available, there is some indication that research in this area continued to rely upon small sample sizes (i.e., less than 100) and was largely qualitative. Few projects utilised longitudinal data and there were very few projects employing a randomised control trial design. The challenges of utilising these methodologies within the child welfare field is likely to influence the extent to which they are employed; however, leading researchers and advocates in the field have consistently identified the critical need for this type of research.

Organisations conducting child protection projects (such as government departments, universities and non-government organisations) appear to be more likely to have worked alone than with other organisations, although the information available suggests that almost one-third of projects were conducted by more than one type of organisation. From the limited data available from respondents to the audit, it would appear that there continues to be low level of funding for research in this field.

It is expected that the projects identified through this audit will be publicly available via an online database. It is hoped that this online database, and the results of this audit, will provide researchers with a valuable tool to build upon the strengths of this broad research field and fill critical “knowledge gaps”. The continued development of research within this field, along with the availability and continuous updating of the database, will ensure that practitioners and policy-makers have access to an evidence base from which they can plan and deliver services that improve outcomes for Australia’s children.

### Key audit findings

	Number	%
Total projects identified	1,359	100.0
Project type <sup>a</sup>		
Research	959	79.5
Program evaluation	163	13.5
Project topic <sup>a</sup>		
Child abuse and neglect	778	57.2
Out-of-home care	371	27.3
Issues relating to Indigenous Australians	222	16.3
Total funding	\$10,120,183	

Note: <sup>a</sup> Project numbers do not include those for which type or topic of project could not be identified. Projects may also fall into more than one category.

# Protecting Australia's children research audit (1995–2010) Final report

## 1 Objectives

The specific aims of the *Protecting Australia's Children Research Audit (1995–2010)* are to identify:

- research projects (published and unpublished) undertaken in Australia between the 1995–2010 period on topics of relevance to the report *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* (“National Framework”; Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2009b);
- outcomes and progress since the *Audit of Australian Out-of-Home Care Research* (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004) and the *National Audit of Australian Child Protection Research 1995–2004* (Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, Richardson, & Aldana, 2005);
- gaps, duplication and areas for development in relation to the outcomes and national priorities identified in the National Framework; and
- priorities for future research and data collection on the basis of the audit results, outcomes of the Towards a National Agenda forum (October 2009) and priorities identified in the National Framework.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this audit, an online resource that can be used for the purposes of a “rolling audit” has been produced. This resource includes information about all of the research projects identified through this audit and enables an ongoing monitoring process of research being undertaken in these fields.

An audit of research conducted in these areas is critical, considering the issues facing the child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) sectors in Australia. These issues include increasing notifications of child abuse and neglect, and increasing numbers of children and young people being brought into and remaining in state care.

In order to make the best use of research resources, it is necessary to have a clear picture of the research that has already been conducted and the work that still needs to be done. Without this information, there is potential for wasteful duplication and gaps in knowledge.

Since 2004, four key projects have sought to provide a clear picture of Australian research about child abuse and neglect, child protection and out-of-home care. Taken together, these projects cover a period from January 1995 to October 2006. They are:

- *Audit of Australian Out-of-Home Care Research* (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004): an audit of Australian research about out-of-home care undertaken between 1995–2004;
- *National Audit of Australian Child Protection Research 1995–2004* (Higgins et al., 2005): an audit of Australian research about child abuse prevention, the protection of children and the care of children subject to a child protection intervention undertaken between 1995–2004;

<sup>1</sup> This research forum, Towards a National Research Agenda: Protecting Australia's Children, was hosted by the National Child Protection Clearinghouse and involved leading researchers and key policy-makers working in the fields of child abuse and neglect, child protection and out-of-home care. The research forum led to the development of a list of research priorities.

- *Out-of-Home Care in Australia: Messages From Research* (Bromfield, Higgins, Osborn, Panozzo, & Richardson, 2005): an in-depth review of out-of-home care research undertaken between 1995–2004 and a summary of key messages from research identified through the Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) audit, and additional research identified; and
- *Getting the Big Picture: A Synopsis and Critique of Australian Out-of-Home Care Research* (Bromfield & Osborn, 2007): a review of Australian out-of-home care research identified through the Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) audit, and research undertaken after the release of that audit (2005 to October 2006).

In addition to these projects, another piece of work, entitled *A Systematic Map of the Out-of-Home Care Literature 1995–2008* (Mayfield, 2009), has identified Australian research undertaken in the field of out-of-home care.

The development of a national research agenda as part of the three-year action plan (COAG, 2009a) for the National Framework (COAG, 2009b) highlights the need for an up-to-date audit of research in these fields. In recognition of the contributing influence of universal prevention and early intervention strategies for reducing child abuse and neglect (as outlined in the National Framework), such an audit needs to include these topics.

The current audit encompasses the topics of child abuse and neglect, child protection, out-of-home care and the broader topics of universal prevention and early intervention. Together, these fields reflect the six supporting outcomes outlined in the National Framework. By documenting Australian research conducted over the past 16 years in these fields, this audit brings together a significant body of knowledge about protecting Australia's children. It documents areas of strength and concentrated research, and identifies areas where further research evidence is needed to support actions under the National Framework.

## 2 Methodology

The methodology for this audit drew upon those used in similar previous audits conducted in the fields of child abuse and neglect and child protection (Higgins et al., 2005) and out-of-home care (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004). In keeping with Higgins et al. and Cashmore and Ainsworth, this audit sought to identify the number of *projects* (not publications) that have been completed since 1995.

The first step was to identify the audit criteria (i.e., what should be included or excluded). The second step was to identify projects that met the inclusion criteria. This process consisted of two main methods: a literature search and collecting information (using an online audit form) about projects that researchers or organisations are currently undertaking or have completed since 1995. The third step was to integrate the findings of previous audits. All of these steps are described below.

The audit team undertaking these tasks consisted of staff from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). Staff from the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales contributed to the analysis of the findings from the audit.

### 2.1 Audit criteria

The first step for the audit was to decide upon the audit criteria; that is, which projects would be included and which excluded from the audit. There were two key questions that needed to be answered at this stage:

- What *types* of project will be included in the audit?
- What *topics* are relevant to the audit?

Both of these two key questions are explored below.

#### Project types

In order to remain consistent with previous audits, the definition that Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) used to set the parameters for research was also used for this audit. They defined “research” as:

the systematic gathering of information involving data collection and analysis, using either original data or administrative data sets. (p. 9)<sup>2</sup>

In short, if a project involved the analysis (i.e., interpretation) of data, it was included in the audit, and therefore encompassed program evaluations.<sup>3</sup> However, the following types of evaluation projects were excluded:

- program descriptions where there was no evaluation per se;
- process evaluation or quality assurance procedures where the impact or outcome of the program was not assessed.
- Literature reviews, unless they were systematic literature reviews or research audits, were also excluded.

#### Project topics

On the face of it, identifying the topics that might be relevant to the audit would appear to be relatively straightforward. Projects on the following topics were clearly relevant:

- child abuse and neglect;
- child protection (e.g., service systems, assessment, intervention); and
- out-of-home care.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This definition of research was also utilised in the Higgins et al. (2005) audit and the Bromfield and Osborn (2007) report (two of the four key projects referred to on pages 1–2 of this report).

<sup>3</sup> A broad definition of “data” was used for the purposes of the audit. Data included qualitative and quantitative data, data collected from human subjects, data sourced from administrative data sets, government policies (i.e., policy analysis), case files, news/media reports, medical records and data sourced from legal proceedings (e.g., sentencing decisions).

<sup>4</sup> In keeping with the Higgins et al. (2005), audit research regarding the effect of child abuse and neglect on adult survivors was excluded, as this is a large, separate body of research that relates more closely to mental health

However, the above topics do not cover the entire scope of the National Framework, which is specifically based on the premise that in order to bring about a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time, the vulnerability of families can be reduced through universal prevention and early intervention strategies. Hence, three of the six supporting outcomes (outcomes 1, 2 and 5) in the National Framework have a preventative focus.

A methodological challenge of this audit was that including *all* research that addressed some aspect of universal prevention and early intervention could have led to the identification of a very broad range of projects that said little about the protection of children. On the other hand, such research could be relevant because it could inform policy-makers about the broader issues that need to be considered in order to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The decision regarding which topics to include was guided by the initial literature searches, which provided an indication of which search terms were likely to produce a significant number of projects that were not relevant. For example, in supporting outcome 3, only those risk factors most commonly associated with child abuse and neglect (i.e., family violence, parental substance and abuse, and parental mental illness) were included unless, in the publication abstract, another risk factor (e.g., poverty, homelessness) was explicitly referred to in relation to child abuse and neglect.

Table 1 provides a detailed description of those topics deemed to have been relevant to the audit, and maps these topics against the supporting outcomes in the National Framework. The descriptions of the supporting outcomes outlined in the National Framework were used to develop this table (COAG, 2009b).

## 2.2 Phase 1: Literature search

In order to identify projects that met the audit criteria, extensive searches of the literature were made, utilising the following two databases:

- Australian Family and Society Abstracts (AFSA): bibliographic database that indexes abstracts from published and unpublished material of relevance to Australian families;<sup>5</sup> and
- Australian Research Online (ARO): online database that includes information from public research repositories of Australian universities and the Australian Digital Theses Program.

In order to identify projects from the literature search, a filtration process consisting of three key stages was followed:

1. A judgement was made, based upon the abstract, as to whether the research met the criteria (as outlined in section 2.1).
2. These records were then scrutinised more thoroughly and analysed according to whether the type of project (e.g., research and outcome/impact evaluation) and topic of project (as outlined in section 2.1) met the inclusion criteria.
3. In order to capture *projects* (rather than publications) the records were checked, and where multiple publications were identified as belonging to the same project, these records were “collapsed” into a single record.<sup>6</sup>

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than the protection of children (see Higgins et al., 2005, p. 3).

5 Source documents included journals, conference papers, books, book chapters, government publications, research reports, discussion and working papers, statistical documents, annual reports, bibliographies and theses.

6 It is difficult in some cases to “match” publications to a single project. Publications were only collapsed into one project if the information presented was the same as or very similar to another publication. Where a publication reported on a different topic but as part of the same research data set, this was still listed as a separate project. Where it was not clear if multiple publications related to the same project, they were listed as individual projects. Audit form respondents were able to identify which publications were associated with a specific project.

**Table 1 Topics included and excluded from the audit, by National Framework supporting outcomes**

Supporting outcome	Included topics	Excluded topics
1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child abuse and neglect education (including public awareness campaigns)</li> <li>▪ Community education programs about children, parenting, child development and children's needs</li> <li>▪ Children's participation in decisions regarding child protection, juvenile justice, family court and out-of-home care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family-friendly work policies and practices</li> </ul>
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prevention and early intervention (of child abuse and neglect) services/programs</li> <li>▪ Children at risk (of child abuse and neglect)</li> <li>▪ Service availability/service access/service improvements for vulnerable/at-risk families <sup>a</sup></li> <li>▪ Area-based disadvantage/intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children vulnerable to or at risk of homelessness/ school drop-out etc. (i.e., not at risk of abuse or neglect but "at risk" for other factors)</li> </ul>
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Risk factors for abuse and neglect <sup>b</sup></li> <li>▪ Domestic violence, parental alcohol and drug abuse, and parental mental health problems and parenting/ children <sup>c</sup></li> <li>▪ Adult treatment services and "child focus"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children's mental health or behavioural difficulties <sup>d</sup></li> <li>▪ Children/young people's use of alcohol or drugs</li> <li>▪ Family "conflict" (unless there is explicit reference to violence)</li> <li>▪ Adolescent to parent abuse</li> </ul>
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child abuse and neglect (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, emotional abuse/neglect, physical neglect and exposure to family violence)</li> <li>▪ Child protection (e.g., service systems, assessment and intervention)</li> <li>▪ Out-of-home care (including foster care, kinship care, leaving care and reunification)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Effect of child abuse or neglect on adult survivors</li> </ul>
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to address Indigenous disadvantage (e.g., housing)</li> <li>▪ Community-wide strategies to address alcohol misuse and family violence</li> <li>▪ Community-led or community-identified solutions to protecting children</li> <li>▪ Indigenous children in OOHC maintaining connection to family, community and culture</li> <li>▪ Partnerships between government, service providers and Indigenous families/communities that relate to protecting children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Health and wellbeing of Indigenous children (unless specific mention of child abuse and neglect is made)</li> <li>▪ General studies on Indigenous disadvantage</li> <li>▪ Indigenous people and suicide (unless it relates to child abuse and neglect)</li> </ul>
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child sexual abuse/assault</li> <li>▪ Sexual exploitation of children (e.g., online sexual exploitation)</li> <li>▪ Child sex abuse perpetrators</li> <li>▪ Children's sexually abusive behaviour</li> <li>▪ Sibling sexually abusive behaviour</li> </ul>	

Notes: <sup>a</sup> The category of service availability/service access/service improvements was included because of the focus in the National Framework on "right services at the right time" (p. 17). For this specific inclusion category, all the risk factors identified in the National Framework were included. They are: poverty and social isolation, unstable family accommodation and homelessness, poor child and maternal health, childhood disability, mental health and behavioural problems, young people disconnected from their families, schools and communities, past experiences of trauma. <sup>b</sup> Research that specifically mentions risk factors for abuse and neglect was included (e.g., relationship between homelessness and abuse and neglect); however, research that addressed an issue that may be associated with abuse and neglect but did not specifically mention it as a risk factor was not included (e.g., families at risk of homelessness). <sup>c</sup> These risk factors were included because they are most commonly associated with the occurrence of child abuse and neglect, and identified in families involved with child protection services (COAG, 2009a). <sup>d</sup> Childhood mental health and/or behaviour problems are identified as a risk factor for abuse and neglect in the National Framework; however, as with other risk factors in the National Framework, only research that related children's mental health or behaviour difficulties to child abuse and neglect was included (see note <sup>b</sup> above).

The literature search identified a total of 636 projects that met the inclusion criteria for the audit (see Appendix A for a full list of search terms used for the literature searches).<sup>7</sup>

This literature search did not incorporate publications or theses on the topics of child abuse and neglect and child protection published in the period 1995–2004, as this search had already been conducted as part of the Higgins et al. (2005) audit. We therefore undertook the same filtration process above on all the publications and theses identified by Higgins et al. (2005) and identified a total of 368 *projects* from among these.<sup>8</sup> Where abstracts could not be found for some of these projects but the report/article title indicated the reference met the inclusion criteria for the audit, the reference was included; however, the potential for detailed analysis in these cases was limited.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.3 Phase 2: Online audit form

To capture information about other projects that fit the inclusion criteria, we developed a web-based survey (the “audit form”; see Appendix B). A similar method was utilised for the both the Higgins et al. (2005) and Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) audits. This audit form was made available through the National Child Protection Clearinghouse website from mid-September 2010 to the beginning of November 2010.

The benefit of collecting information about projects directly from researchers and organisations (“stakeholders”) through an online survey was that projects that had not been reported in published form and any published research not captured by AFSA and ARO could also be identified.

### Inclusion criteria

It was expected that overly complex inclusion criteria (as outlined in Table 1) could potentially have discouraged potential participants. Therefore, in order to clearly highlight to stakeholders what topics of research were within the scope of the audit, the inclusion criteria were simplified and organised into eight themes. These themes reflect the first four supporting outcomes of the National Framework:<sup>10</sup>

- building safe and supportive communities for children and/or families (supporting outcome 1);
- support for vulnerable and at-risk families (supporting outcomes 2 and 3);
- the prevention of child abuse and neglect (including primary, secondary and tertiary prevention) (supporting outcomes 2 and 3);
- child abuse and neglect (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, emotional abuse/neglect, physical neglect and witnessing family violence) (supporting outcome 4);
- child protection services and/or systems and/or practices (supporting outcome 4);
- other child protection issues (including but not limited to: reporting abuse and neglect, approaches to risk assessment, identification of risk factors for child maltreatment, treatment of adolescent or adult offenders) (supporting outcome 4);
- support for children who have been abused or neglected (supporting outcome 4); and
- out-of-home care (including leaving care) (supporting outcome 4).

7 One of the limitations of the information about projects gathered via the literature search was that the majority of abstracts did not indicate whether or not a project (upon which that publication is based) was completed. For the purposes of this audit, a project sourced via the library search was coded as being completed during the year of publication (unless the abstract stated otherwise). A related limitation of this approach is that the project may have been completed, but the year of publication may not have been the same as the year in which the project was completed. These limitations need to be taken into account when considering the findings of this report regarding the year or period of completion of projects.

8 Higgins et al. (2005) identified a total of 353 publications and 165 theses in their literature search; however, the filtration process led to the identification of 368 relevant *projects* from those combined publications/theses.

9 As Higgins et al. (2005) only included projects that met their definition of “research” (the same definition of research used in the current audit, see page 3), all of those projects can be deemed to meet the definition of research used in the current audit.

10 Separate themes for supporting outcomes 5 and 6 were not included, as supporting outcome 5 encompasses all supporting outcomes (with a specific focus upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities) and supporting outcome 6 is a subset of supporting outcomes 2, 3 and 4 (i.e., the prevention of sexual abuse, community education, supporting survivors, etc.).

By simplifying the audit criteria, however, it was possible that some entries received via the online audit form would not meet the inclusion criteria for the audit. Therefore, each audit form entry was manually checked against the inclusion/exclusion criteria before it was included.

In addition to asking stakeholders to identify the theme of their project, we also asked them to provide the following information:

- the project title;
- the year of project commencement, whether the project was completed and, if so, the year of project completion;
- the chief investigators on the project;
- the discipline(s) of the chief investigators (e.g., social work, psychology, law);
- the type of organisation(s) undertaking the project (e.g., university, government, non-government organisation [NGO]);
- whether the project was conducted as part of the requirements of a degree program (e.g., professional doctorate/PhD);
- the aim/purpose of the project;
- the project type (i.e., research and/or evaluation);
- the type of program evaluated (if it was an evaluation project);
- the research question/hypothesis;
- whether the project addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect and, if so, what type(s) of maltreatment were addressed;
- the major findings and implications of the project;
- the data sample (i.e., what sample was used and the size of the sample);
- funding amount and funding organisation; and
- products generated from the project (e.g., journal articles, conference papers, reports).<sup>11</sup>

It is important to note that while every effort was made to clearly define terms in the audit form, some inconsistencies may exist between the way in which the audit form respondents categorised their projects and the way in which the audit team categorised projects identified through the literature search. For example, a number of audit form respondents identified their project as addressing the topic of the “prevention of child abuse and neglect”, yet when asked whether their project addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect, they responded “No”. When coding the projects identified through the literature search, however, all projects that mentioned child abuse and neglect in the title or abstract were coded as addressing child abuse and neglect.

For those audit responses where there were obvious coding anomalies, these were amended.<sup>12</sup> However, some potential anomalies (e.g., a project that does not mention child abuse and neglect in the aim/purpose, findings or implications section but is identified as addressing that issue) may not be as straightforward as they seem. In these cases, the information provided was taken as being correct.

A total of 267 projects were entered through the online audit form,<sup>13</sup> 198 of which were identified by the audit team as meeting the inclusion criteria.

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11 The questions we asked were based upon the audit form used for collecting data in the Higgins et al. (2005) audit form; however, not all the information that was collected was analysed and included in the 2005 report. Such information has been omitted from the current audit form. A copy of the audit form is available at Appendix B.

12 The three coding anomalies that were amended were: (a) where the project addressed the topic of the “prevention of child abuse and neglect” but were coded as not addressing child abuse and neglect, they were recoded as addressing child abuse and neglect; (b) where the project addressed the topic of “supporting children who have been abused or neglect” but were coded as not addressing child abuse and neglect, they were recoded as addressing child abuse and neglect; and (c) funding amounts that appeared to be incorrectly entered (e.g., less than \$150) were deleted. Those projects that were identified by audit form respondents as being relevant to the topic of “building safe and supportive communities for children/families” were reviewed and some were amended, as these data were then used to discuss the proportion of projects that addressed the supporting outcomes of the National Framework. This topic was used to discuss supporting outcome 1, and the inclusion criteria for this supporting outcome is relatively specific; hence the need for some amendments to audit form responses to this particular question.

13 For ease of submission, organisations and government departments that had conducted multiple projects over the past 16 years were offered an alternative method for entering information about their research. They were given a

After the deadline for submission of projects via the online audit form had passed, we were alerted to a number of hitherto unidentified projects that may have met the inclusion criteria for the audit. However, as the analysis of the data had already been completed at that stage it was impossible to include those projects in the audit (see section 4.5). These projects can be added to the online database (see section 5).

## Promoting the online audit form

The Higgins et al. (2005) audit involved an intensive process of contacting relevant networks, agencies, organisations and government departments in order to encourage people conducting research in the area to submit the details of their projects via the online audit questionnaire. Nevertheless, Higgins et al. noted that: “the number [135 in total] of audit responses was lower than expected” (p. 7), and acknowledged that this is one of main limitations of relying upon a self-report audit form to gather information about research. In their review of out-of-home care research, Bromfield and Osborn (2007) also identified a number of publications via a literature search that had not been captured by the Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) audit (which identified a total of 94 projects), suggesting that Cashmore and Ainsworth’s methodology, which also relied partly upon self-report, also did not capture all the projects undertaken during the 1995–2004 period.

In recognition of the limitations of the 2004 and 2005 audit process, in the current audit we used the library search as the main method for identifying projects for the audit. The online audit form was used as a supplementary method for collecting information about unpublished research and research that was not identified through the literature search.

Nevertheless, an intensive process of promoting the audit questionnaire was undertaken for this audit in order to capture as much information as possible about projects undertaken during the 1995–2010 period. The various aspects of this promotion are outlined below.

### *Services and agencies*

All of the child and welfare agencies approached for the Higgins et al. (2005) audit (30 in total) were contacted by phone and asked to distribute information about the audit questionnaire to all relevant staff within their organisation. They were also asked to disseminate information about the audit questionnaire to their own networks (e.g., affiliated researchers, other agencies etc).

### *Universities*

The research offices of all universities across Australia (38 in total) were contacted by phone and asked to distribute information about the audit questionnaire to all relevant faculties and postgraduate student networks within their university.

An email about the audit questionnaire was also sent to all heads of school, deans of departments and faculties that were identified through the Higgins et al. (2005) audit (248 in total).

### *Governments*

Representatives from each state/territory government were contacted by phone and/or email and informed of the research audit.

### *Other key contacts*

Based on stakeholder lists and informal networks from the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Social Policy Research Centre, other key people and organisations contacted to promote the audit and encouraged to contribute details about relevant research were:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare;
- Australian Institute of Criminology; and
- invitees to the Towards a National Research Agenda forum (69 in total; see footnote 1).

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spreadsheet into which it was easier to “cut and paste” information about multiple projects. This spreadsheet was provided to organisations and government departments, upon request, as feedback suggested that completing the online form for each individual project, was time-consuming. These responses are included in the overall total for the audit questionnaire responses.

Other forums where the audit was promoted included:

- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth Update (October 2010);
- online Early Childhood News bulletin (EdNA);
- National Child Protection Clearinghouse e-alert subscriber list;
- National Child Protection Clearinghouse *childprotect* discussion list members;
- Communities and Families Clearinghouse (CAFCA) e-alert subscriber list;
- Closing the Gap Clearinghouse website;
- AIFS e-alert; and
- AIFS seminar on *Safeguarding and Protecting Children Across the United Kingdom*, presented by Dr Sharon Vincent (13 October 2010) (approximately 40 attendees).

These organisations or groups of researchers were asked to complete the online audit form and/or forward the information about the audit to any organisations or researchers working in the relevant fields and encourage them also to complete the audit form.

## 2.4 Integrating findings of previous projects

As discussed previously, the current audit covers the topics and time periods of four other key project reports (see page 1–2). All of these projects sought to identify and/or analyse the quality of Australian research on the topics of (a) child abuse and neglect and child protection; or (b) out-of-home care.

In addition to these projects, we also identified a fifth report that was a useful source of information on Australian research: *A Systematic Map of the Out-of-Home Care Literature* (Mayfield, 2009).

Mayfield's (2009) report identified available Australian and international literature on the topic of out-of-home care published during the 1995–2008 period. It also provided a “map” to illustrate which areas have a substantive evidence base and where there were gaps requiring further research. Only the Australian literature identified by Mayfield (2009) was included in the filtration process described in section 2.2.

The results of the Higgins et al. (2005) literature search were used to identify research relating to the topics of child abuse and neglect and child protection published in the period 1995–2004 (see section 2.2). In addition, we reviewed the reference lists of the other four reports to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria for the current audit. It was expected that by doing so the current audit would provide a more comprehensive picture of projects undertaken in the relevant fields.<sup>14</sup>

This process of review involved:

- cross-checking each publication in the reference list against the projects identified through the current audit's literature search and online audit form;
- identifying online abstracts for those publications that had not been captured via the literature search or audit questionnaire (where abstracts could not be found but the report/article title indicated the publication was relevant to the audit, the reference was included as a project; however, the potential for detailed analysis of items identified in this way is limited); and
- applying the three-step filtration process (see section 2.2) for the literature search.

A total of 58 projects that were identified from the four other key reports had not been captured via the literature search or audit form.

All of the projects collected through the Higgins et al. (2005) audit form (135 in total) were included in this audit.<sup>15</sup> As detailed information about the projects collected for the Cashmore and Ainsworth

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<sup>14</sup> Some of the publications sourced through the reference list of the five aforementioned key reports did not have abstracts. However, as the criteria for those five reports were similar to the current audit, the project title was used to determine relevance. In those cases where the title indicated the project was relevant to the current audit, it was included. For the general literature search, if an abstract was not available, the project was not included, regardless of the title of the project.

<sup>15</sup> Detailed information (e.g., findings, methodology) about some of the 135 projects collected through the Higgins et al. (2005) audit form is not available. As these projects had already been reviewed to determine whether they

(2004) audit (94 in total) was not available for the purposes of this audit, only projects identified in the Cashmore and Ainsworth reference list (58 publications in total) were checked against the inclusion criteria for the current audit.

## 2.5 Cross-checks between sources

Once all of the projects had been identified from the three key sources (library search, audit form and the five projects described in section 2.4), they were cross-checked to ensure that there was no duplication of projects. As discussed previously, although every effort was made to ensure individual publications were “matched” to projects, in some cases this was difficult, especially for publications where abstracts were not available.

### **Text box 1: Categorising projects**

Throughout the results section of this report, we refer to the “categorisation of projects”. This refers to the process whereby salient information about projects (e.g., project topic, project type, methodology) was identified. For those projects received via the online audit form, projects were categorised by project researchers themselves. Projects identified via the literature search were categorised by the audit team.

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met the inclusion criteria for the Higgins et al. (2005) audit (see Higgins et al., 2005, p. 9), all of these projects were automatically deemed to be relevant to the current audit.

## 3 Results

Table 2 provides a summary of the projects identified in this audit. Each item is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

<b>Table 2 Key audit findings</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total projects identified</b>	<b>1,359</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Project type <sup>a</sup>		
Research	959	79.5
Evaluation	163	13.5
Project topic <sup>a</sup>		
Child abuse and neglect	778	57.2
Out-of-home care	371	27.3
Issues relating to Indigenous Australians	222	16.3

Note: <sup>a</sup> Project numbers do not include those for which type or topic of project could not be identified. Projects may also fall into more than one category.

### 3.1 Number of projects identified

A total of 1,359 projects were identified over the 16-year period (1995–2010). The number of projects completed in three roughly equal time periods (1995–2000, 2001–05 and 2006–10) is provided in Table 3.

This table shows that the completion/publication dates for projects collected for this audit were fairly evenly spread across the 16 years, with only slightly more in the 2001–05 period (32.2%), compared to the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods.

<b>Table 3 Distribution of projects identified, by year completed, 1995–2010</b>		
<b>Year project completed <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Number (% of total projects)</b>	<b>No. of publications</b>
1995–2000	389 (28.6)	373
2001–05	438 (32.2)	438
2006–10	390 (28.7)	584
Project not completed at time of audit	82 (6.0)	133
Year completed not specified	60 (4.4)	37
<b>Total projects</b>	<b>1,359 (100.0)</b>	<b>1,565</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year of completion was either the year identified by the audit form respondents or that of the publication from which the project was identified. Percentages may not total 100.0% due to rounding.

### 3.2 Project sources

The source from which these projects were identified, are listed in Table 4. There are two important points to make about findings presented in this table.

Firstly, it is important to note that even with comprehensive library searches, cross-checks and the use of the audit form, this may be an underestimation of the total number of research and evaluation projects undertaken relating to protecting Australia’s children during the 1995–2010 period. This is because not all projects have associated publications (and would, therefore, not have been captured via the library searches) and, although widely publicised, the audit form was not completed by all researchers/evaluators working in the area, either because they were not aware of it or did not have time to complete it.

Secondly, as discussed in the methodology section, although every effort was made to identify individual projects from the library searches, there may be some instances where projects have

been listed more than once as a result of the difficulties associated with “matching” publications to projects.

Sources of projects	Number (% of total projects)
2005	
Literature search	368 (27.1) <sup>a</sup>
Online audit form	99 (7.3) <sup>b</sup>
2010	
Literature search	636 (46.8)
Online audit form	198 (14.6)
Cross-checks with other projects	58 (4.3)
<b>Total projects</b>	<b>1,359 (100.0)</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> This number includes publications and theses identified in the Higgins et al. (2005) audit. Although Higgins et al. (2005) identified a total of 518 publications (353 publication and 165 theses), not all of these met the inclusion criteria for the current audit and some were “matched” to projects identified through other sources. <sup>b</sup> 135 projects were received via the audit form for the Higgins et al. (2005) audit; however, some were “matched” to projects identified through other sources. Percentages may not total 100.0 due to rounding.

### 3.3 Project type: Research or program evaluation

Projects were categorised according to whether they were a research, evaluation or research and evaluation project (see Text Box 2).<sup>16</sup>

#### Text Box 2: Definition of research projects and evaluation projects

Although all the projects identified for this audit can be categorised broadly as “research” (i.e., “the systematic gathering of information involving data collection and analysis, using either original data or administrative data sets”), it is useful to specifically identify evaluation projects. For the purposes of this audit, “evaluation” is defined as any project that focuses on collecting data for the purposes of determining the worth, merit or value of a specific program or activity. Research projects, in contrast, are defined as those that are intended to generalise findings from a sample to a larger population. A project that comprised both of these elements was coded as a research and evaluation project.

A total of 1,207 projects (88.8% of the total number of projects) undertaken during the 1995–2010 period were identified as fitting into one of these categories or an “other” relevant category.<sup>17</sup> The results are presented in Table 5.

Project type	Number (% of total projects)
Research	959 (79.5)
Evaluation	163 (13.5)
Both research and evaluation	74 (6.1)
Other (e.g., research audit, systematic literature review, government review/inquiry)	11 (0.9)
<b>Total projects</b>	<b>1,207</b>

<sup>16</sup> The audit team used publication abstracts to code projects according to the project type. In those cases where the project type was not specified, the program type was coded as “not specified”. For audit forms, the respondents themselves identified the project type. The audit form provided information about how these two terms were defined.

<sup>17</sup> For the remaining 152 projects, insufficient information was available to determine whether they were research and/or evaluation projects. Those projects coded, as “other” ( $n = 11$ ), were not research or evaluation projects (e.g., research audits, systematic literature reviews) but were still relevant to the current audit (see “Project types”, page 3).

The most common project type was research (79.5%), followed by evaluation (13.5%). Only a relatively small proportion were both research and evaluation projects (6.1%).

Projects identified through the audit forms (both 2005 and 2010) were much more likely to be evaluations compared to those identified through library searches. A total of 232 projects that identified project type (i.e., research and/or evaluation) were identified through the audit forms, and of those, 81 (34.9%) were either evaluation or research and evaluation projects.

This suggests that although formal publication of results may not be a high priority for organisations undertaking evaluation projects (as noted by Higgins et al., 2005), these organisations are still keen to disseminate information about those projects (as evidenced by their completion of the audit form).

### 3.4 Types of programs evaluated

In total, 235 evaluation projects (including both evaluation only and research and evaluation) undertaken during the 1995–2010 period were identified (17.3% of the total number of projects).

Table 6 shows the number of evaluation projects undertaken during each specific time period. This table shows that while there was a slight decrease in the proportion of evaluation projects between the 1995–2000 period and the 2001–05 period (14.4% and 13.9% respectively), there was a notable increase during the 2006–10 period (20.8%).

<b>Year project completed <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>No. of evaluation projects (% of total projects)</b>	<b>Total projects</b>
1995–2000	56 (14.4%)	389
2001–05	61 (13.9%)	438
2006–10	81 (20.8%)	390
Not completed at time of audit	28 (34.1%)	82
Year not specified	9 (15.0%)	60
<b>Total evaluation projects</b>	<b>235 (17.3%)</b>	<b>1,359</b>

These evaluation projects were categorised according to what type of program was being evaluated (some programs fell into multiple categories, hence a single evaluation project could be coded for more than one program type).<sup>18</sup> In those cases where the type of program evaluated was not specified ( $n = 54$ ), the program type was coded as “not specified”. All the types of evaluation programs that Higgins et al. (2005) identified were included in this analysis, and a further four categories were added, namely: out-of-home care programs; collaborations, cross-sector partnerships and improving links between services; early intervention and prevention programs; and family violence support programs).

Table 7 shows the number of projects that evaluated a specific program type as a proportion of the total number of evaluation projects (not including 54 projects coded as “not specified”). In the evaluations, the most common program type being evaluated was family support programs (30.9%), followed by prevention programs for children (19.3%) and tertiary intervention programs for child victims (16.6%). The least common program types evaluated were collaborations, cross-sector partnerships and improving links between services (3.9%); early intervention and prevention programs (3.3%); and family violence support programs (2.8%).

Table 8 shows the number of projects that evaluated a specific program type as a proportion of the total number of evaluation projects completed during each specific time period (including those projects where the completion year was not identified or the project was not yet completed).

<sup>18</sup> The audit team used publication abstracts to code evaluation projects according to the type of program evaluated. For audit forms, the respondents themselves identified what type of program was evaluated.

**Table 7 Distribution of evaluation projects identified, by types of programs evaluated (where identified)**

Type of program evaluated	Number (% of total evaluation projects)
Family support programs	56 (30.9)
Prevention programs for children	35 (19.3)
Tertiary intervention programs for child victims	30 (16.6)
Out-of-home care programs <sup>a</sup>	22 (12.2)
Parent education programs	19 (10.5)
Statutory child protection services	12 (6.6)
Specialist/innovative child protection programs	12 (6.6)
Community education programs	12 (6.6)
Child-focused programs within adult-oriented services	10 (5.5)
Community development programs	9 (5.0)
Collaborations, cross sector partnerships and improving links between services	7 (3.9)
Early intervention and prevention programs	6 (3.3)
Family violence support programs	5 (2.8)
Other <sup>b</sup>	24 (13.3)
<b>Total evaluation projects</b>	<b>181</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> “Out-of-home care programs” include mentoring programs for young people leaving care, supporting and training for carers, support programs for parents whose children are in out-of-home care. <sup>b</sup> The category “other” includes those projects that belonged to a single subtopic (i.e., the project did not address more than one topic) with fewer than five projects. Examples of these subtopics include: evaluation of assessment tools ( $n = 2$ ), implementation of legislation ( $n = 2$ ), programs to support high-risk adolescents ( $n = 2$ ), and school-based violence prevention programs ( $n = 1$ ). Percentages total more than 100.0% as projects could evaluate more than one program type.

**Table 8 Distribution of evaluation projects identified, by type of program evaluated and year completed, 1995–2010 (where identified,  $n = 181$ )**

Type of program evaluated	Year project completed <sup>a</sup>				Not yet completed ( $n = 27$ )
	1995–2000 ( $n = 42$ )	2001–05 ( $n = 50$ )	2006–10 ( $n = 53$ )	Year not specified ( $n = 9$ )	
	No. (% of total completed during period)				
Family support programs	9 (21.4)	11 (22.0)	20 (37.7)	2 (22.2)	14 (51.9)
Prevention programs for children	4 (9.5)	6 (12.0)	15 (28.3)	1 (11.1)	9 (33.3)
Tertiary intervention programs for child victims	10 (23.8)	7 (14.0)	9 (17.0)	2 (22.2)	2 (7.4)
Out-of-home care programs	4 (9.5)	12 (24.0)	4 (7.5)	1 (11.1)	1 (3.7)
Parent education programs	1 (2.4)	2 (4.0)	6 (11.3)	2 (22.2)	8 (29.6)
Statutory child protection services	1 (2.4)	2 (4.0)	2 (3.8)	0	7 (25.9)
Specialist/innovative child protection programs	0	5 (10.0)	2 (3.8)	1 (11.1)	4 (14.8)
Community education programs	1 (2.4)	1 (2.0)	5 (9.4)	0	5 (18.5)
Child-focused programs within adult-oriented services	1 (2.4)	0	5 (9.4)	0	4 (14.8)
Community development programs	0	0	8 (15.1)	0	0
Collaborations, cross sector partnerships and improving links between services	1 (2.4)	4 (8.0)	2 (3.8)	0	7 (25.9)
Early intervention and prevention programs	3 (7.1)	1 (2.0)	2 (3.8)	0	6 (22.2)
Family violence support programs	2 (4.8)	0	3 (5.7)	0	5 (18.5)
Other <sup>a</sup>	8 (19.0)	5 (10.0)	6 (11.3)	2 (22.2)	3 (11.1)

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year of completion was either the year identified by the audit form respondents or that of the publication from which the project was identified. Percentages total more than 100% as projects could evaluate more than one program type.

Excluding projects that were not yet completed, or for which the year of completion was not indicated, Table 6 provides an indication of changes over time. An analysis of these projects suggests that from 1995–2000 to 2006–10 there were *increases* in the both the actual numbers and the proportion of completed projects that evaluate programs that related to:

- family support (from 21.4% of projects to 37.7%);
- child abuse prevention (9.5% to 28.3%);
- parent education (from 2.4% to 11.3%);
- community education (from 2.4% to 9.4%);
- child-focused programs within adult-oriented services (from 2.4% to 9.4%); and
- community development (from 0% to 15.1%).

On the other hand, there were *decreases* between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods in the proportion of completed evaluation projects that evaluated tertiary intervention programs (from 23.8% to 17.0%). However, in actual numbers of projects, it was a decrease of only one (from 10 in 1995–2000 to 9 in 2006–10). This suggests that while the total volume of child protection related research in Australia has increased over that time period, the evaluations of tertiary intervention for children remained stable, and that other comparatively neglected areas started to receive more attention. In addition, 10.0% of evaluation projects completed in the 2001–05 period were specialist or innovative child protection programs, compared to only 3.8% of evaluation projects completed in the 2006–10 period and none in 1995–2000. Moreover, the proportion of completed projects that evaluated out-of-home care programs increased in the 2001–05 period (from 9.5% to 24.0%), but decreased in the 2006–10 period (from 24.0% to 7.5%).

A comparison of the findings from this audit, for the 1995–2005 period, with the findings from the Higgins et al. (2005) audit (which looked at the 1995–2004 period) provides an insight into the changes over time in the focus of program evaluations.

Higgins et al. (2005) found that the three most common types of programs evaluated during the 1995–2004 period were prevention programs for children (21.7%), family support programs (16.9%), and tertiary intervention programs, parent education programs and statutory child protection services (each 12.4%). This audit similarly found that during the 1995–2005 period the three most common types of programs evaluated were family support programs (30.9%), prevention programs for children (19.3%) and tertiary intervention programs (16.6%).<sup>19</sup>

Although the order of most to least common of the three most common types of programs evaluated is different for this audit, when compared to Higgins et al. (2005), the most common types identified are similar, except when considering the fact that Higgins et al. (2005) found that the proportion of evaluations that were about tertiary intervention programs was *equal* to the proportion of projects that evaluated statutory child protection services or parent education programs (12.4%). In the current audit, we found that during the 1995–2005 period, the proportion of projects that evaluated tertiary intervention programs (14.5%;  $n = 17$ ) was higher than the proportion that evaluated parent education programs (2.6%;  $n = 3$ ) and statutory child protection services (2.6%;  $n = 3$ ).

The difference in proportion of the programs evaluated relating to each type between this audit and Higgins et al. (2005) could be attributed to a number of factors, including the issue noted previously regarding the validity of categorisations assigned by some respondents to the 2005 audit form. As a result of including projects from which only an abstract was available, a larger number of projects was identified in the current audit (1,359), compared to the Higgins et al. (2005) audit; however, we were unable to categorise many of these according to the evaluation program type based on the information contained in the abstract. It may also be, however, that because Higgins et al. (2005) did not identify how many individual publications related to each project, this resulted in the identification of a larger number of project types (due to the potential for double counting).

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<sup>19</sup> The current audit identified a total of 117 evaluation projects completed in the 1995–2005 period.

## 3.5 Project topics

Project topics were analysed according to three categories:

- supporting outcomes under the National Framework;
- child abuse and neglect; and
- out-of-home care.

The results of this analysis are presented below.

### Supporting outcomes under the National Framework

As discussed earlier, in order to clarify the scope of this audit we used the National Framework to identify which topics were relevant to each supporting outcome (see Table 1). We used the information in this table to then categorise all of the projects according to the supporting outcomes they addressed (projects could fall into more than one supporting outcome).<sup>20</sup> There was insufficient information available to categorise 120 (8.8%) of projects.<sup>21</sup> The results for the remaining projects during the 1995–2010 period are presented in Table 9.

<b>Supporting outcome<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>No. (% of total projects)</b>
1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities	33 (2.7)
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early	215 (17.4)
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed	133 (10.7)
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing	1,040 (83.9)
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities <sup>b</sup>	16 (1.3)
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support <sup>c</sup>	206 (16.6)
<b>Total projects</b>	<b>1,239</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> See Table 1 on page 5 for topics included in each supporting outcome. <sup>b</sup> The proportion of projects that addressed issues relating to supporting outcome 5 differs from the proportion that addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians (see section 3.9). This is because supporting outcome 5 has a much narrower focus than those projects that address issues relating to Indigenous Australians (see footnote 49). <sup>c</sup> This includes all the projects that addressed sexual abuse specifically as a form of maltreatment (see Table 12), plus two other projects that addressed sexually abusive behaviours of child and young people but did not identify it explicitly as a form of child abuse. Percentages total more than 100% as projects could address more than one supporting outcome.

It is important, when reviewing these results, to take into account the breadth and scope of each supporting outcome. For example, only a comparatively small proportion of the total number of projects addressed supporting outcome 1 (Children live in safe and supportive families and communities), as the topics deemed relevant to this particular topic were fairly limited in scope (i.e., child abuse and neglect education; community education programs; and children’s participation in decisions regarding child protection, juvenile justice, family court and out-of-home care). Therefore, while there may be many research projects that could be considered to relate to the fairly broad

<sup>20</sup> A project was deemed to address the supporting outcome if it referred to one or more of the topics aligned with it in Table 1 in the title or abstract of the publication(s). Projects received via the audit form were coded for supporting outcome according to the “theme” identified in the audit form; however, where respondents identified “build safe and supportive communities for children and their families” as a theme, these were reviewed as this category has very specific inclusion criteria (see footnote 12).

<sup>21</sup> Although these projects did not have sufficient information to determine the supporting outcome to which they were related, they were deemed to meet the inclusion criteria for the audit because the title clearly indicated they were relevant, even though not enough information was provided to indicate which supporting outcome they related to, or they had been identified as being relevant in previous projects (e.g., Higgins et al., 2005).

topic of the safety of children in communities and families; the scope of this topic, within the context of the National Framework, is likely to exclude many of these projects.

In comparison to supporting outcome 1, supporting outcome 4 incorporates a broad range of relevant topics (i.e., child abuse and neglect, child protection—including child protection services—and out-of-home care); hence, comparatively, a much larger proportion of projects were identified that relate to supporting outcome 4.

The results in Table 9 show the following:

- Comparatively few projects have investigated issues regarding community education about child abuse and neglect, parenting, child development and children's needs (*supporting outcome 1* included all these topics and totalled only 2.7% of the total number of projects). This is supported by the data in Table 7 that showed that of all the evaluation projects identified in this audit, only 6.6% evaluated community education programs.
- The National Framework states that children's participation in decisions regarding child protection, juvenile justice, family court and out-of-home care is a "key signal of valuing and supporting children" (p. 15). Compared to research about most other supporting outcomes, the low proportion of projects addressing *supporting outcome 1* suggests that this topic is also under-researched.
- A much higher proportion of projects (83.9%) have looked at issues relating to child abuse and neglect after it has occurred and/or out-of-home care (i.e., *supporting outcome 4*) rather than those factors relating to prevention and early intervention, and related issues such as children at risk, area-based disadvantage and service access for vulnerable/at-risk families (i.e., *supporting outcome 2 and 3*) (28.1% total). This reflects the nature of the child welfare service system that historically has also had a higher concentration of resources at the "pointy end" of the system (i.e., statutory services), compared to resources targeted towards vulnerable/at-risk families who fall below the threshold for statutory intervention (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008).
- Those projects that addressed service access for vulnerable/at-risk families (i.e., a subtopic of *supporting outcome 2*) tended to focus upon a range of issues relating to supporting vulnerable/at-risk families or programs, rather than focusing specifically upon service access.
- Most of the projects that addressed area-based disadvantage (i.e., a subtopic of *supporting outcome 2*) were associated with the former Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy was a national initiative specifically designed to support children and families, with one strand (Communities for Children) focusing on children and families living in disadvantaged communities (Edwards et al., 2009; Muir et al., 2009).
- A sub-analysis of *supporting outcome 3* projects shows that of those projects that looked at a specific risk factor (i.e., domestic/family violence, substance abuse and/or mental illness) ( $n = 76$ ), 81.6% looked at domestic/family violence, while only 10.5% looked at substance abuse and 7.9% at mental illness.
- Comparatively, very few projects were related to addressing Indigenous disadvantage; community-wide strategies addressing alcohol misuse and family violence; community-led or community-identified solutions to protecting children; Indigenous children in out-of-home care maintaining connection to family, community and culture; and partnerships between government, service providers and Indigenous families/communities that relate to protecting children (*supporting outcome 5*, total: 1.3%). Higgins (2010) highlighted the importance of community-led solutions for preventing and responding to child abuse and maltreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Comparatively, the topics of child sexual abuse, the prevention of child sexual exploitation and support for child sexual abuse survivors (*supporting outcome 6*) is a fairly well researched topic (16.6%, the third most common topic). This is not surprising considering the fact that sexual abuse has received a significant amount of attention from researchers internationally (Higgins, 2004).

## Child abuse or neglect

The topic of child abuse or neglect was addressed in 778 projects<sup>22</sup> identified through the audit (57.2% of all projects identified).<sup>23</sup> Projects that addressed the issue of child abuse or neglect ranged from those that focused solely upon this topic (e.g., the prevalence of child abuse and neglect among a specific subgroup of the population) to those that referred to the issue of child abuse or neglect (e.g., prevention of child abuse and neglect, children in out-of-home care and educational outcomes that included a consideration of how trauma resulting from abuse and neglect may impact upon educational outcomes).

Table 10 shows the projects that addressed child abuse and neglect as a proportion of the total number of projects identified.

**Table 10 Distribution of projects addressing the topic of child abuse or neglect, by year completed, 1995–2010**

Year project completed <sup>a</sup>	No. of child abuse or neglect projects (% of total projects)	Total projects
1995–2000	244 (62.7%)	389
2001–05	228 (52.1%)	438
2006–10	207 (53.1%)	390
Not completed at time of audit	44 (53.7%)	82
Year not specified	55 (91.7%)	60
<b>Total child abuse or neglect projects</b>	<b>778 (57.2%)</b>	<b>1,359</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year of completion was either the year identified by the audit form respondents or that of the publication from which the project was identified.

The results in Table 10 show that:

- for completed projects where time of completion was specified, the highest proportion of projects addressing child abuse and neglect was during the 1995–2000 period (62.7%); and
- the proportion of projects addressing child abuse and neglect during the 2001–05, 2006–10 and for those projects not yet completed was relatively similar (52.1%, 53.1% and 53.7% respectively).

A qualitative analysis was conducted of the available information for all 778 projects that addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect in order to determine what topics they were addressing.<sup>24</sup> Of those 778 projects, there was insufficient information to identify subtopics for 118 of them.<sup>25</sup>

22 Of these, 474 were completed during the 1995–2004 period. It is difficult to make a comparison between the number of projects identified for this audit and the number of projects identified for the Higgins et al. (2005) audit as the latter identified 135 projects (via the audit form) and 518 publications/theses (via the literature search) but did not identify how many of these publications/theses were separate projects.

23 The audit team coded projects as addressing the issue of child abuse or neglect if “child abuse or neglect” (or a similar term such as “child maltreatment”) was referred to in the abstract or title of the publication(s) associated with that project. For the audit form, respondents themselves identified whether the project addressed this issue. The Higgins et al. (2005) audit form did not ask participants to identify whether their project addressed the issue of child abuse or neglect; however, as the Higgins et al. (2005) audit criteria specified that only research looking at abuse or neglect would be included, it was assumed that all of the 2005 audit form responses included in the current audit ( $n = 99$ ) addressed the issue of child abuse or neglect.

24 The available information for publications was abstracts. The available information for projects received via the audit form was the aim/purpose, findings and implications of the projects that respondents themselves identified.

25 The 118 projects where insufficient information was available were from the following sources: (a) the Higgins et al. (2005) online audit form ( $n = 38$ ); (b) the online audit form for the current audit ( $n = 22$ ); and (c) the Higgins et al. (2005) literature search ( $n = 58$ ). The reasons for insufficient information were as follows: (a) only the details of some of the projects entered via the Higgins et al. (2005) online audit form were available (see footnote 15) and where the title did not clearly indicate a specific subtopic, the project was categorised as “not specified”; (b) some respondents to the 2010 online audit form categorised their project as addressing issues relating to child abuse and neglect, but the information they provided did not identify *how* it was relevant (e.g., a project that investigated young people leaving care but did not mention anything related to abuse or neglect) (see section 4.5)—in these cases, it was not possible to identify a subtopic relating to abuse and neglect, therefore the project was categorised as “not specified”; (c) Higgins et al. (2005) identified 165 theses as part of their literature search (see footnote 8) and detailed information about some of these projects is not publicly available. Where the title did not clearly indicate the subtopic of the project, it was coded as “not specified”.

The qualitative analysis included most of the topics used by Higgins et al. (2005) to sort projects.<sup>26</sup> A number of other categories that emerged frequently were also added to the list that Higgins et al. (2005) devised. A total of 29 topics were identified. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 11.

As outlined in Table 11 (see 20), the three most common topics for projects addressing child abuse and neglect were: support and/or treatment for children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse and neglect and their families/parents/carers (17.6%);<sup>27</sup> workforce, practice and system issues (17.4%); and family violence (14.8%).

There are several notable findings from this analysis:

- Projects addressing the topic of *support and/or treatment for children* who have experienced or are at risk of abuse and neglect and their families/parents/carers included a range of research and evaluation projects ranging from early intervention programs to therapeutic interventions for young people who had experienced abuse. As an extremely vulnerable group, it is encouraging to note that a significant proportion of research is addressing how to support these children and their families/parents/carers.
- However, *client experiences of programs and services* is a comparatively under-researched topic, suggesting that while priority has been given to researching support and treatment for children (17.6%), less priority has been given to evaluating how clients experience the programs designed to support them (3.9%).
- Projects addressing the topic of *workforce, practice and system issues* included a range of sectors that work with children (including child protection, child welfare and education), issues in practice at both the micro (e.g., parent–worker relationships) and macro levels (e.g., collaborative work practices between sectors), and broad systemic issues (e.g., research utilisation in child protection). Research on workforce, practice and system issues is important as these factors are critical to the protection of children. Child protection services have, in recent years, become overwhelmed by increasing demand (i.e., notifications); therefore improving approaches to workforce, practices and system issues could contribute to improving this situation (Higgins & Katz, 2008). Factors such as working in partnership and collaborating between sectors can improve responses to child protection (Higgins & Katz, 2008).
- A more extensive qualitative analysis of these specific projects could determine the proportion that address workforce issues that were identified as research priorities in the Towards a National Research Agenda forum (AIFS, 2009), such as technology in human service organisations; leadership in human service organisations; funding issues; and recruitment, retention, education, training and remuneration.
- Although projects relating to workforce, practice and system issues were common, just over 1 in 10 projects related more specifically only to statutory child protection work, that is, *reporting abuse and neglect, identification of risk factors and approaches to risk assessment* (11.1% in total).
- A significant proportion of projects addressed the topic of the *impact of child abuse/neglect on children/young people* (14.7%). The amount of research on this topic has been acknowledged as extensive (Lamont, 2010).
- While providing support and/or treatment of children who are risk of abuse and neglect could be seen as a form of prevention, it is important to note that only a small proportion of projects that addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect explicitly referred to prevention or early intervention programs/services (6.4%).
- Of all types of child maltreatment, sexual abuse has received the most attention in the research field internationally (Higgins, 2004). This trend is reflected in Australia, with enough projects to warrant the inclusion of the separate topic of *perpetrators/offenders of child sexual abuse*. There

<sup>26</sup> There was only one category that was not included: policy analysis/government reports. Rather than keeping this as a separate category, the topics of policy analyses and government reports were identified and the projects were categorised accordingly.

<sup>27</sup> This category appears similar to supporting outcome 3, for which there were 1,040 projects deemed relevant (see Table 9); however supporting outcome 3 is very broad in scope and includes child protection services and out-of-home care. The category in Table 11 refers only to specific discrete programs, services or projects that focus upon support and/or treatment for children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse and neglect and their families/parents carers.

were not, however, enough projects addressing perpetrators/offenders of any *other* forms of maltreatment to warrant a separate category. A small proportion of projects addressed the issue of *characteristics of abusive families/parents*.

**Table 11 Distribution of child abuse or neglect projects, by subtopics addressed (where identified)**

Subtopic	No. (% of total child abuse or neglect projects)
Support and/or treatment for children who have experienced or are at risk of abuse and neglect and their families/parents/carers (e.g., programs to support mothers and children whose relationships have been damaged by domestic violence, support services for highly disadvantaged children who have experienced abuse, intensive family support services, group treatment program for adolescent girls who have experienced sexual abuse)	116 (17.6)
Workforce, practice and system issues (including sectors other than child protection) (e.g., decision-making, joint working relationships, workforce stress and burnout)	115 (17.4)
Family violence (e.g., trends, impact on children, relationships between family violence and other types of maltreatment)	98 (14.8)
Impact of child abuse/neglect on children/young people (e.g., impact of witnessing domestic violence upon children, association between child maltreatment and problematic peer relationships among children, impact of chronic maltreatment on children)	97 (14.7)
Legal issues and Family and Children's Court (e.g., jurors' decision-making and experiences of child sexual abuse cases, reasons why child sexual abuse cases are not prosecuted, child abuse and other family violence in the Family Court)	58 (8.8)
Prevention programs/services (e.g., befriending and therapeutic network offering emotional and practice support to carers and children at risk of abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse prevention programs, services for families and children at risk of entering the child protection system)	42 (6.4)
Community (including media portrayals) and professional attitudes towards child abuse/neglect and child protection (e.g., tertiary students' attitudes towards child sex offending, how professionals influence one another in their child abuse reporting behaviours, media focus on child protection rather than child abuse)	50 (7.6)
Child abuse and neglect statistics (e.g., annual Australian Institute of Health and Welfare <i>Child Protection Australia</i> reports)	33 (5.0)
Reporting child abuse and neglect (e.g., facilitators and inhibitors of mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse, under-reporting of child sexual abuse, accuracy of children's reporting of abuse, primary school teachers' reporting of suspected child sexual abuse)	30 (4.6)
Identification of risk factors for child maltreatment (e.g., models for predicting maltreatment reoccurrence, decision-making of child protection workers during risk assessments at intake)	29 (4.5)
Child deaths (e.g., annual reports of the Victorian Child Death Review Committee, child abuse homicides)	28 (4.2)
Indigenous-specific research (e.g., family violence in Indigenous communities, child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, preventing Aboriginal family violence)	27 (4.1)
Perpetrators/offenders of child sexual abuse (including treatment of perpetrators/offenders) (e.g., childhood sexual abuse experiences of convicted child offenders, cost-benefit analysis of child sex offender treatment programs, child sex offenders in an online environment, recidivism of child sex offenders)	26 (4.0)
Client experiences of programs and services (including evaluation of programs) (e.g., survey of clients receiving services from child protection department, children's satisfaction with crisis accommodation and support for women and children experiencing domestic violence, children and parents' experiences of child protection interventions)	25 (3.9)
Disclosure and/or investigation of child abuse (e.g., questioning children about repeated abuse, investigating online child pornography, child sexual abuse disclosure in culturally and linguistically diverse communities)	24 (3.6)
Abused children in care (e.g., neglect as a factor that affects likelihood of reunification, effects of sexual abuse on children in foster care, difficulties in recruiting foster carers for children traumatised by abuse and/or neglect, vulnerability of young people leaving care who have a history of abuse/neglect)	20 (3.0)
Prevalence/incidence of child abuse and neglect	21 (3.2)

Subtopic	No. (% of total child abuse or neglect projects)
Abuse and/or neglect in institutional contexts (e.g., a case study of child sexual abuse within a church community, government responses to institutionalised neglect)	17 (2.6)
Characteristics of abusive families/parents (e.g., characteristics of young people who sexually abuse their siblings, characteristics of families that may contribute to a breakdown in care, step-parents as perpetrators of child physical abuse)	16 (2.4)
Approaches to risk assessment (i.e., risk assessment within a statutory framework) (e.g., standardised assessment of parenting within child protection agencies, home-based family assessment to address child protection risks and family support needs, the impact of personal characteristics of child protection workers' on risk assessment performance)	14 (2.1)
Children displaying sexual behaviours, adolescent sex offenders and sibling sexual abuse (e.g., child protection practitioners perspectives of sexual behaviours between adolescent and child siblings, sibling sexual abuse prevention program, adolescent sex offender treatment program)	13 (2.0)
Child abuse and neglect and the medical setting (e.g., identifying child abuse in an emergency department, medical professionals' communication about abused children)	10 (1.5)
Definitions and conceptual issues (e.g., constructing meanings and identities in child protection practice, changing concepts of neglect, the discursive construction of risk in child protection practice)	10 (1.5)
Children's perspectives/narratives of abuse (e.g., listening to the voices of abused children, children's definitions of child abuse)	9 (1.4)
Economic costs of child abuse and neglect and cost-benefit analyses	9 (1.4)
Family contact or reunification for children in care (e.g., child abuse notifications after children have left out-of-home care, child contact arrangements when there is violence in the family, contact services for children and non-residential parents where there are high levels of conflict or concerns about safety)	8 (1.2)
Methodological issues/issues with data (e.g., what does client satisfaction reveal about program effectiveness, the limitations of using statutory child protection data for research into maltreatment)	6 (0.9)
Renotification/resubstantiation (e.g., predictors of subsequent abuse notifications among children who have left out-of-home care, child and family factors associated with re-referral of cases of suspected child abuse and neglect)	6 (0.9)
Research audits	6 (0.9)
Other <sup>a</sup>	34 (5.2)
<b>Total child abuse or neglect projects (excluding "not specified")</b>	<b>660</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> The category "other" includes those projects that belonged to a single subtopic (i.e., the project did not address more than one topic) with fewer than five projects. Examples of these subtopics include: multi-type maltreatment ( $n = 4$ ), relationship between poverty and maltreatment ( $n = 3$ ), service access ( $n = 2$ ) and violence against children in homelessness accommodation ( $n = 1$ ). Percentages total more than 100% as projects could address more than one topic.

## Maltreatment type

Those projects that addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect were coded according to the type or types of maltreatment they addressed (a project could address more than one type of maltreatment).<sup>28</sup> The results for the 1995–2010 period are presented in Table 12. This table shows the projects that addressed a specific maltreatment type, all maltreatment types, or those where maltreatment type was not specified as a proportion of the total number of projects (778) that addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect.

More than one-third of projects did not specify a maltreatment type. These projects included those that referred to child abuse and neglect in generic terms or where insufficient information

<sup>28</sup> We coded all evaluation projects according to maltreatment type based on the titles and abstracts of publications. Where a project referred to "child abuse and neglect" (or a similar term) without identifying the type of child abuse or neglect, we coded it as "Type not specified". Those projects that specifically mentioned every type of abuse and neglect (i.e., physical, sexual, psychological, neglect and witnessing domestic violence) or used a term such as "all types of maltreatment" were coded as "All five maltreatment types". Participants who submitted information via the 2010 audit form were asked to specify themselves the maltreatment type(s). The "Type not specified" category was not required for the audit form.

was available to determine whether specific maltreatment types were focused on. Over the entire 1995–2010 period, the most common specific type of maltreatment addressed was sexual abuse (26.2%), followed by witnessing family violence (16.1%), other maltreatment types (e.g., medical child abuse, homicide, child death) (6.0%), physical abuse (5.8%), neglect (4.6%) and psychological maltreatment (3.6%).

**Table 12 Distribution of child abuse or neglect projects, by maltreatment type(s) addressed**

Maltreatment type	Number (% of total child abuse or neglect projects)
Sexual abuse	204 (26.2)
Witnessing family violence <sup>a</sup>	125 (16.1)
Other	47 (6.0)
Physical abuse	45 (5.8)
Neglect	36 (4.6)
Psychological maltreatment	28 (3.6)
Type not specified <sup>b</sup>	289 (37.1)
All five maltreatment types <sup>c</sup>	113 (14.5)
<b>Total child abuse or neglect projects</b>	<b>778</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> The category “witnessing family violence” includes projects where “family violence” (or a similar term) was explicitly mentioned. In some jurisdictions, witnessing family violence is categorised as psychological maltreatment. For this audit, projects categorised as addressing “witnessing family violence” were *not* categorised as addressing “psychological maltreatment”. <sup>b</sup> The category “type not specified” includes those projects that used generic terms such as “child abuse or neglect” and “child maltreatment” but did not specify which types of child abuse or neglect were the focus, and those where insufficient information was available to identify maltreatment types. Projects that referred to a specific type of maltreatment and also used a generic term (e.g., “the project focuses on child abuse and neglect and how sexual abuse particularly impacts upon children”) were coded as that specific maltreatment type only. A number of projects referred to child abuse and neglect and family violence (i.e., family violence as a separate category); these projects were coded as “family violence” only. <sup>c</sup> The category “all five maltreatment types” refers to projects that specifically stated that they addressed all types of abuse and neglect or those that individually listed all five maltreatment types. Percentages total more than 100.0% as projects could address more than one maltreatment type.

Of those projects that addressed sexual abuse, witnessing family violence, physical abuse, neglect or psychological maltreatment ( $n = 340$ ), most (85.0%) focused solely upon one type of maltreatment. Of those projects that addressed sexual abuse ( $n = 204$ ), a significant proportion (81.9%) focused only on sexual abuse and no other form of maltreatment.

These findings are consistent with previous research, which has shown that the topic of sexual abuse dominates child abuse and neglect research (Higgins, 2004).<sup>29</sup> Although there are some inconsistencies between these findings and the findings from the Higgins et al. (2005) audit, a qualitative analysis of the data collected for the 2005 audit shows that research on single maltreatment subtypes tended to focus upon child sexual abuse and family violence and that, “there [is] a lack of research investigating issues specifically associated with child physical abuse, psychological maltreatment or neglect” (p. 26).<sup>30</sup> The current audit shows that this has remained true when looking at the entire 1995–2010 period (though see Table 13 on page 23 for a more detailed analysis of changes over time).

Although this audit identified witnessing family violence as the second most common specific form of maltreatment addressed, it is important to note that as part of the search strategy for this audit, *all* projects that addressed the topic of family violence and children and/or parenting were included, regardless of whether the project specifically focused on the effect of witnessing family violence on children, or its relationship to child abuse and neglect (see inclusion criteria for supporting outcome 2 in Table 1). In other words, the number of projects addressing family violence is indicative of the number of projects that focus upon the topic of family violence and children and/

<sup>29</sup> One of the reasons for a greater focus upon sexual abuse could be that maltreatment types such as sexual abuse are more concrete and measurable when compared to other types of maltreatment, such as emotional abuse and neglect (Bromfield & Arney, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> The reasons for the discrepancies between the findings from the audit form and the qualitative analysis in the Higgins et al. (2005) audit are attributed to the quality of the audit form responses.

or parenting but not indicative of the number of projects that address family violence specifically as a form of child maltreatment in itself or as a risk factor for other forms of abuse/neglect.

A significant proportion of projects did not specify maltreatment type. This was because insufficient information was available, or “abuse” or “maltreatment” was referred to in a generic sense. Table 13 outlines changes over the 1995–2010 period in research conducted on the maltreatment types. Changes over time are represented according to the year in which the project was completed.

**Table 13 Changes over time in distribution of child abuse or neglect projects, by maltreatment types and year completed (1995–2010)**

Maltreatment type	Year project completed <sup>a</sup>				Not yet completed
	1995–2000	2001–05	2006–10	Year not specified	
	No. (% of total projects during period)*				
Sexual abuse	74 (30.3)	67 (29.4)	51 (24.6)	4 (7.3)	8 (18.1)
Witnessing family violence <sup>b</sup>	34 (13.9)	44 (19.3)	38 (18.4)	3 (5.5)	6 (13.6)
Physical abuse	7 (2.9)	13 (5.7)	17 (8.2)	1 (1.8)	7 (15.9)
Neglect	5 (2.0)	10 (4.4)	13 (6.3)	2 (3.6)	6 (13.6)
Psychological maltreatment	3 (1.2)	9 (3.9)	8 (3.9)	2 (3.6)	6 (13.6)
Type not specified <sup>c</sup>	95 (38.9)	86 (37.7)	62 (30.0)	41 (74.5)	5 (11.4)
All five maltreatment types <sup>d</sup>	17 (7.0)	14 (6.1)	44 (21.3)	8 (14.5)	30 (68.2)
Other	18 (7.4)	13 (5.7)	11 (5.3)	0	0

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year project completed was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified. <sup>b</sup> The category “witnessing family violence” includes projects where “family violence” (or a similar term) was explicitly mentioned. In some jurisdictions, witnessing family violence is categorised as psychological maltreatment. For this audit, projects categorised as addressing “witnessing family violence” were *not* categorised as addressing “psychological maltreatment”. <sup>c</sup> The category “type not specified” includes those projects that used generic terms such as “child abuse or neglect” and “child maltreatment”, but did not specify which types of child abuse or neglect were the focus and those where insufficient information was available in the abstract or the abstract was not available to identify maltreatment types. Projects that referred to a specific type of maltreatment and also used a generic term (e.g., “the project focuses on child abuse and neglect and how sexual abuse particularly impacts upon children”) were coded as that maltreatment type only. <sup>d</sup> The category “all five maltreatment types” refers to projects that specifically stated that they addressed all types of abuse and neglect or those that individually listed all five maltreatment types. Percentages total more than 100% as projects could address more than one maltreatment type. For the total number of projects addressing child abuse and neglect during these periods, see Table 10.

The findings outlined in Table 13 illustrate the following:

- The proportion of projects within each of the three periods that were focused on sexual abuse decreased over time, from 30.3% of the total number of projects completed in 1995–2000 to 29.4% in 2001–05 and 24.6% in 2006–10. This suggests that compared to other forms of maltreatment, the focus upon sexual abuse in research has declined over the past 16 years.
- The proportion of projects that focused upon witnessing family violence increased between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods (from 13.9% to 18.4% respectively).
- Only a comparatively small number of projects ( $n = 45$ ) referred specifically to physical abuse. However, over the three time periods there appears to have been a slight increase in the proportion of projects that focused on physical abuse (2.9%, 5.7% and 8.2% respectively).
- Only a small number of projects referred specifically to neglect ( $n = 36$ ); however, over the three time periods there appears to have been a slight increase in the proportion of projects that focused on neglect (2.0%, 4.4% and 6.3% respectively).
- Only a small number of projects referred specifically to psychological maltreatment ( $n = 28$ ); however, between the 1995–2000 and 2001–05 periods there appears to have been a slight increase in the proportion of projects that focused on psychological maltreatment (1.2% and 3.9% respectively, remaining at 3.9% in the 2006–10 period).
- Between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods, there was a notable increase in the proportion of projects that addressed all five maltreatment types (7.0% to 21.3% respectively). This may reflect a move towards a more sophisticated understanding of the field of child abuse or neglect.

## Out-of-home care

Out-of-home care was a topic addressed in 371 projects identified for this audit (27.3% of the total number of projects identified).<sup>31</sup> Relying on personal responses from researchers/organisations, a search of key reports and documents, and a search of funding databases, Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) identified 94 projects undertaken during the 1995–2004 period. The methodology for the current audit, using literatures searches supplemented by an audit form, identified 172 projects during that same period (i.e., 1995–2004).

Table 14 shows the projects that addressed out-of-home care as a proportion of the total number of projects completed during those time periods.

<b>Year project completed <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>No. of OOHC projects (% of total projects)</b>	<b>Total projects</b>
1995–2000	69 (17.7)	389
2001–05	131 (29.9)	438
2006–10	135 (34.6)	390
Not completed at time of audit	30 (36.6)	82
Year not specified	6 (10.0)	60
<b>Total projects</b>	<b>371 (27.3)</b>	<b>1,359</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year project completed was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified.

The findings suggest that between the 1995–2000 and 2001–05 periods, there was a notable increase in the number and proportion of projects addressing the issue of out-of-home care (from 17.7% to 29.9% respectively). This increased again during the 2006–10 period (to 34.6%). Overall, the findings suggest that during the past 16 years there has been an increase in the focus by researchers on out-of-home care.

Although an increase in the proportion of projects about out-of-home care could be a positive phenomenon for the protection of Australia’s children (reflecting an increased interest and an increased body of knowledge), Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) noted that there was a need for large-scale, multiple-site cross-state projects (p. 11), as a significant proportion of projects they identified were based on “small non-random samples, often in single agency services” (p. 10). If a larger proportion of projects about out-of-home care is attributed to a larger number of such small-scale research projects, this is not necessarily a positive shift.

A qualitative analysis was conducted of all 371 projects that addressed the issue of out-of-home care in order to determine what topics they were addressing. All the categories that were used to sort projects were drawn from Mayfield’s (2009) systematic map of out-of-home care projects. Mayfield (2009) categorised research according to 17 content areas, 10 of which were covered by Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004). Seven other themes that were identified during the coding process were added to the topic classification framework: out-of-home care statistics and trends, abused children in care, parents/families of children in out-of-home care, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties of children/young people in out-of-home care, abuse of children/young people in out-of-home care, analysis/comparison/review of policies relating to out-of-home care; and meeting the needs of children/young people in out-of-home care. Of the 371 projects, there was insufficient information to identify subtopics for 14 (3.8%) of them.<sup>32</sup> The results of the analysis are presented in Table 15.

31 For the purposes of the current audit, out-of-home care was a primary focus of a project if it referred to out-of-home care or a related term (e.g., kinship care, foster care, residential care, substitute care, leaving care, etc.) in the title or abstract of a publication (literature search) or where audit respondents identified the project as addressing the topic of “out-of-home care”.

32 The 14 projects where insufficient information was available were from the following sources: (a) the online audit form for the current audit ( $n = 10$ ); (b) the Higgins et al. (2005) literature search ( $n = 2$ ); and (c) projects identified via cross-references to previous projects ( $n = 2$ ) (see section 2.4). The reason for insufficient information for the projects sourced from the 2010 online audit form and the Higgins et al. (2005) literature search are outlined in footnote 25. The abstracts of some projects sourced through cross-references to previous projects were not available (see section 2.4). Where abstracts were not available and the title did not clearly indicate a subtopic these projects were categorised as “not specified”.

Notable findings from Table 15 include:

- For projects that addressed the issue of out-of-home care, the most frequent topics were: outcomes for children and young people in care (23.2%), foster care (21.7%) and out-of-home care statistics and trends (10.1%).
- Studies that included outcomes for children and young people in care were the most frequent type of out-of-home care research. This focus is a promising sign, given that Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) identified outcome studies as an urgent research priority. However, few studies undertook primary research on child outcomes of the kind recommended by Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004)—specifically, large-scale quantitative studies across multiple jurisdictions. Only two studies were longitudinal.
- Studies on foster care were the second most numerous type. These include studies on the recruitment and retention of foster carers, support and training for carers, the impact of fostering on different family members, and the experiences of Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) carers. A small number of these projects focused upon options for improving the recruitment and retention of carers.
- In 2004, Cashmore and Ainsworth noted that research about out-of-home care has an “almost exclusive focus on foster care” (p. 24). The current audit, which captured a larger number of projects than the Cashmore and Ainsworth audit, supports their findings to the extent that there is a strong focus upon foster care (21.8% of out-of-home care research), especially when compared to residential and kinship care (7.3% and 6.4% respectively).
- Kinship care is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care in Australia and internationally (McHugh, 2009), but the relative lack of Australian research on both statutory and informal kinship care has been identified as a gap (McHugh, 2009; McHugh & Valentine, 2010). For this audit, kinship care was a central theme of 23 of the studies, relating to both formal/statutory care and informal care. It is important to note, however, that most of the projects categorised as “outcomes for children and young people in care”, and all of the large-scale quantitative studies, relate only to statutory care. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) annual reports on trends in out-of-home care (part of the Child Protection Australia series) are also limited to statutory out-of-home care (i.e., not including informal kinship care) (AIHW, 2011).
- Thirty-six studies include out-of-home care statistics and trends as a theme. Of these, 13 are the annual AIHW and individual state reports on child protection statistics.<sup>33</sup> The remainder are mostly analyses of data collection systems and/or reviews of the reasons behind the increase in number of children living in out-of-home care and ways in which this increase could be arrested or reversed. Three studies include a history of out-of-home care systems and substitute care provision in Australia, as a means of providing contextual information on these trends.
- The participation of children or young people in decisions affecting their lives is one of the topics identified as a key issue in the National Framework (as part of supporting outcome 1). Within the field of out-of-home care research, this topic has been addressed in 29 projects. The majority of these projects ( $n = 13$ ) were undertaken during the 2001–05 period.
- In addition to research about kinship care, another possible research priority identified by Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) was permanency planning. A small number of projects addressed issues relating to reunification and permanency planning ( $n = 15$ ) and a very small number addressed adoption from care ( $n = 3$ ). Overall, these two topics constituted 4.9% of the total number of out-of-home-care projects. Half of the 18 projects that addressed reunification and permanency planning or adoption from care were completed before 2005 (9 of the 18), suggesting that even with Cashmore and Ainsworth’s call for further research in this area, research activity on this topic has not increased significantly over the past six years.
- A further qualitative analysis of these projects could determine the extent to which another of Cashmore and Ainsworth’s (2004) possible research priorities has been addressed by research; that is, engaging children and young people in education.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This audit did not capture the 1995–96 AIHW report on child protection, and the 2009–10 AIHW report was not available at the time the audit was being conducted; therefore, a total of 13 AIHW reports were included in the audit.

<sup>34</sup> This was not included as a subtopic for analysis for the current audit.

**Table 15** Distribution of out-of-home care projects, by subtopics addressed (where identified)

Subtopic	No. (% of total OOHC projects)
Outcomes for children and young people in care (e.g., outcomes of placement breakdown and placement instability, educational performance of children and young people in out-of-home care, relationship between out-of-home care and involvement with juvenile justice, outcomes for adolescents with severe conduct disorders in out-of-home care)	83 (23.2)
Foster care (e.g., relationship between support for foster carers and quality of care, availability of foster carers, factors affecting families' willingness to foster, motivations of foster carers, community attitudes to foster care, caregiver payments for foster carers, impact of fostering on children of foster carers)	78 (21.8)
Out-of-home care statistics and trends (e.g., annual Australian Institute of Health and Welfare <i>Child Protection Australia</i> reports)	36 (10.1)
Young people leaving care (e.g., needs of young people leaving care, improving support to young people leaving care, young people leaving care and homelessness, analysis of policies relating to young people leaving care, relationship between leaving care and involvement in the criminal justice system)	34 (9.5)
Residential and specialised models of care (e.g., educational needs of children and young people in residential care, collaboration between professionals involved with children and young people in residential care, conditions required to provide positive residential care, selecting and recruiting residential care staff)	26 (7.3)
Participation of children or young people in decisions affecting their lives (e.g., surveys and consultations with children and young people in out-of-home care about their needs and experiences, children and young people in care contributing to research designs, models for empowering young people in care)	29 (8.1)
Cultural considerations in out-of-home care (e.g., Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, Indigenous children and young people's formation of identity in out-of-home care, appropriate out-of-home care for Muslim children, improved practice for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care)	24 (6.7)
Kinship care (e.g., supporting kinship carers, caregiver payments for kinship carers, analysis of policies relating to kinship care, experiences of children in grandparent kinship care, differences between kinship care and foster care, achieving permanency for children in kinship care)	23 (6.4)
Abused children in care (e.g., neglect as a factor that affects likelihood of reunification, effects of sexual abuse on children in foster care, difficulties in recruiting foster carers for children traumatised by abuse and/or neglect, vulnerability of young people leaving care who have a history of abuse/neglect)	20 (5.6)
Parents/families of children in out-of-home care (e.g., contact between parents and children/young people in out-of-home care, experiences of and support for parents whose children are in out-of-home care, association between contact with parents during care and reunification, staying in contact with siblings while in out-of-home care, engaging the families of children/young people in out-of-home care)	19 (5.3)
Issues for professionals in associated fields working with children and young people in out-of-home care (e.g., decision-making of professionals involved with placing children into care, collaboration and partnerships, record-keeping and archiving in health and welfare agencies, relationships between young people leaving care and human service workers, accreditation processes for organisations that work with children/young people in out-of-home care)	16 (4.5)
Issues relating to reunification and permanency planning (e.g., relationship between child and parental characteristics and reunification, notifications of abuse after reunification, reunification decision-making, experiences of families undergoing reunification, factors contributing to the successful reunification of children and young people in out-of-home care with their families)	15 (4.2)
Characteristics of birth families when children enter care (e.g., social and familial characteristics of families when children enter out-of-home care, children who enter care when their parents are incarcerated, demographic profile of parents whose children are placed in state care, parental drug and alcohol problems among parents whose children are placed in out-of-home care)	11 (3.1)
Emotional and/or behavioural difficulties of children/young people in out-of-home care (e.g., frameworks for managing challenging behaviour of children/young people in out-of-home care, caregiver withdrawal due to challenging behaviour, social and family background of children in out-of-home care with significant emotional and behavioural problems)	12 (3.4)

Subtopic	No. (% of total OOHC projects)
Abuse of children/young people in out-of-home care (e.g., foster carers subject to child protection notifications, abuse of young people in residential care facilities, experiences of adults who were abused during childhood in institutional care environments)	12 (3.4)
Analysis/comparison/review of policies relating to out-of-home care (e.g., examination of policies for children removed from their families, policy changes over time relating to the provision of substitute care, analysis of policy directions relating to child protection systems)	9 (2.5)
Assessment and treatment interventions (e.g., assessment of complexity of children in out-of-home care, models of therapeutic services, therapeutic interventions for children in out-of-home care who are displaying inappropriate sexual behaviours, assessing the mental health of children in out-of-home care)	7 (2.0)
Effective out-of-home care (e.g., effective practices in intake and planning for leaving care, child welfare agencies' understandings of evidence-based practice in out-of-home care practice and policy development, utilisation of evidence-based practice in out-of-home care agencies, characteristics of effective out-of-home care agencies)	7 (2.0)
Case management (e.g., service users' experiences of out-of-home care and family support case management systems, approaches to assessing the progress of children in out-of-home care, assessment and planning materials for out-of-home care)	7 (2.0)
Meeting the needs of children/young people in care	6 (1.7)
Mentoring (e.g., mentoring young people leaving care, mentoring programs for children in out-of-home care)	5 (1.4)
Other <sup>a</sup>	19 (5.3)
<b>Total OOHC projects</b>	<b>357</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> The category "other" includes those projects that belonged to a subtopic with fewer than five projects. Examples of these subtopics include: adoption from care ( $n = 3$ ), therapeutic foster care ( $n = 3$ ), research audits ( $n = 3$ ) and preventing children from entering out-of-home care ( $n = 2$ ). Percentages total more than 100.0% as projects could address more than one topic.

## 3.6 Research infrastructure and funding

### Discipline area

The discipline area of the chief investigators was identified in a total of 315 projects (23.2% of the total number of projects).<sup>35</sup> The results are presented in Table 16.

The findings outlined in Table 16 illustrate that, for those projects where the discipline area of the chief investigators was identified, the most common discipline area was social work (43.2%), followed by psychology (30.8%), social policy (23.8%), other (13.0%), sociology (10.5%), education (8.9%), health (8.3%) and law (3.8%).

Discipline area	No. (% of total projects)
Social work	136 (43.2)
Psychology	97 (30.8)
Social policy	75 (23.8)
Other (e.g., criminology, journalism, community development and theology)	41 (13.0)
Sociology	33 (10.5)
Education	28 (8.9)
Health (including allied health)	26 (8.3)
Law	12 (3.8)
<b>Total projects where discipline area identified</b>	<b>315</b>

Note: Percentages total more than 100% as chief investigators could have more than one discipline area.

<sup>35</sup> Mostly, these data are from the audit form entries (both 2005 and 2010). Regarding the literature search, in the vast majority of cases, publications did not identify the discipline areas of the authors. Only where it was explicitly identified in a publication was the discipline area of the author(s) recorded. Of the 315 projects where discipline area was identified, only 57 (18.1%) were from sources other than audit forms.

Higgins et al. (2005) also found that social work was the most common discipline area of researchers. However, in comparison to the Higgins et al. audit, the current audit found a higher proportion of researchers in the area of psychology compared to social policy, and a higher proportion of researchers in the area of sociology compared to education. In keeping with Higgins et al., the current audit found that the least common discipline area of researchers was law.<sup>36</sup>

Table 17 outlines changes over time in the discipline areas of the chief investigators, where identified. The findings illustrate the following:

- Between the 1995–2000 and the 2006–10 period, the proportion of projects undertaken by researchers from the discipline of social work increased substantially (from 28.6% to 53.8%).
- The proportion of projects undertaken by chief investigators from the following discipline areas has increased gradually over the three time periods:
  - sociology (2.4%, 8.2% and 14.0% respectively); and
  - education (4.8%, 6.1% and 10.8% respectively).
- Although the *actual* number of projects undertaken by chief investigators from the discipline of psychology has increased over the three time periods, the *proportion* of projects has gradually decreased (35.7%, 32.7% and 31.2% respectively), due to an increase in activity in other areas, particularly social work and social policy.

**Table 17** Change over time in distribution of projects, by discipline area of chief investigators (where identified, *n* = 315) and year completed, 1995–2010 (where identified, *n* = 315)

Discipline area	Year project completed <sup>a</sup>				Not yet completed ( <i>n</i> = 80)
	1995–2000 ( <i>n</i> = 42)	2001–05 ( <i>n</i> = 49)	2006–10 ( <i>n</i> = 93)	Year not specified ( <i>n</i> = 51)	
	No (% of total projects completed)				No. (% of total)
Social work	12 (28.6)	16 (32.7)	50 (53.8)	12 (23.5)	46 (57.5)
Psychology	15 (35.7)	16 (32.7)	29 (31.2)	14 (27.5)	23 (28.8)
Social policy	5 (11.9)	4 (8.2)	18 (19.4)	28 (54.9)	20 (25.0)
Sociology	1 (2.4)	4 (8.2)	13 (14.0)	3 (5.9)	12 (15.0)
Education	2 (4.8)	3 (6.1)	10 (10.8)	0	13 (16.3)
Health	2 (4.8)	4 (8.2)	8 (8.6)	0	12 (15.0)
Law	2 (4.8)	1 (2.0)	4 (4.3)	2 (3.9)	3 (3.8)
Other	5 (11.9)	6 (12.2)	19 (20.4)	2 (3.9)	9 (11.3)

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year project completed was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified. Percentages total more than 100% as chief investigators could have more than one discipline area.

**Table 18** Distribution of projects, by type of organisation conducting them (where identified)

Organisation type	Number (% of total projects where org. type identified)
University	175 (48.5)
Government	174 (48.2)
NGO	118 (32.7)
Research Institute	29 (8.0)
Other	10 (2.8)
<b>Total projects where organisation type identified</b>	<b>361</b>

Note: Percentages total more than 100% as projects could be conducted by more than one type of organisation.

<sup>36</sup> The Higgins et al. (2005) audit did not specifically identify researchers from a health background.

These findings regarding changes over time in the discipline area of chief investigators need to be considered in light of the fact that this information was available for less than one-quarter of the total number of projects (23.2%). The findings may have been different had the discipline area of the chief investigators of all the projects been available; however, this information was generally not available in the abstracts of publications, therefore it was difficult to obtain more representative data.

## Types of organisations conducting projects

The types of organisation conducting the projects were identified for a total of 361 projects (26.6% of the total number of projects).<sup>37</sup> The frequency of each organisation type, as a proportion of the total number of projects where organisation type was identified, is outlined in Table 18.

The findings outlined in Table 18 show that of those projects where organisation type was identified, the most frequent organisation type was university (48.5%), followed by government (48.2%), non-government organisations (32.7%), research institutes (8.0%) and “other” organisations, such as consumer organisations, private companies and hospitals (2.8%). The relatively small proportion of projects undertaken by research institutes (8.0%) is likely to be a consequence of the comparatively smaller number of research institutes when compared to, for example, universities and non-government organisations.

**Table 19 Change over time in distribution of projects, by type of organisation conducting them (where identified, *n* = 361)**

Organisation type	Year project completed <sup>a</sup>				Not yet completed ( <i>n</i> = 82)
	1995–2000 ( <i>n</i> = 34)	2001–05 ( <i>n</i> = 61)	2006–10 ( <i>n</i> = 140)	Year not specified ( <i>n</i> = 44)	
	No (% of total completed during period)				No. (% of total)
University	11 (32.4)	21 (34.4)	67 (47.9)	16 (36.4)	60 (73.2)
Government	12 (35.3)	30 (49.2)	64 (45.7)	30 (68.2)	38 (46.3)
Research institute	1 (2.9)	1 (1.6)	13 (9.3)	3 (6.8)	11 (13.4)
NGO	11 (32.4)	19 (31.1)	57 (40.7)	3 (6.8)	28 (34.1)
Other	0	1 (1.6)	3 (2.1)	0	6 (7.3)

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year project complete was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified. Percentages total more than 100% as projects could be conducted by more than one type of organisation.

**Table 20 Distribution of cross-organisational and non-cross-organisational projects, by type of organisation conducting them (where identified, *n* = 361)**

	Government ( <i>n</i> = 174)	University ( <i>n</i> = 175)	NGO ( <i>n</i> = 118)	Research Institute ( <i>n</i> = 29)	Other ( <i>n</i> = 10)
	No. (% of total projects)				
Government	112 (64.4)				
University	57 (32.8)	69 (39.4)			
NGO	17 (9.8)	77 (44.0)	61 (51.7)		
Research institute	12 (6.9)	20 (11.4)	6 (5.1)	6 (20.7)	
Other	6 (3.4)	9 (5.1)	3 (2.5)	0	0

Note: Percentages total more than 100% as more than two types of organisations could conduct a project.

<sup>37</sup> Mostly, these data are from the audit form entries (both 2005 and 2010). Regarding the literature search, in the vast majority of cases, publications did not identify the type of organisation conducting the project. Only where organisation type(s) was explicitly identified in a publication was the organisation type(s) recorded.

Table 19 illustrates changes over time for the types of organisations conducting projects over the 1995–2010 period. Changes over time are represented according to the year the project was completed.

The findings outlined in Table 19 illustrate the following:

- Between 2001–05 and 2006–10, there was an increase in the proportion of projects completed by universities (34.4% and 47.9% respectively), but the proportion of projects completed by government decreased slightly (49.2% and 45.7% respectively).
- Between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods, the proportion of projects completed by non-government organisations increased (32.4%, and 40.7% respectively).

As with the findings regarding the discipline area(s) of chief investigators, these findings regarding the type of organisations conducting projects need to be considered in light of the fact that this information was only available for just over one-quarter of the total number of projects (26.6%). The findings may have been different if information regarding the type of organisations conducting projects was available for all projects; however, this information is generally not available in the abstracts of publications, therefore it is difficult to obtain more representative data. There was also a limited response to the audit tool, which identified only 297 projects out of the total of 1,359 (including projects identified through literature searches).

## Cross-organisational projects

Table 20 shows the number of cross-organisational projects (i.e., projects that were undertaken by more than one organisation type) and the number of single organisational projects (i.e., those projects conducted by one organisation only) as a proportion of each organisational type.<sup>38</sup>

The results outlined in Table 20 show that:

- the most common cross-organisational project type for government was government and university (32.8%);
- the most common cross-organisational project type for universities was university and non-government organisation (44.0%), followed by university and government (32.8%); and
- non-government organisations were most commonly undertaking cross-organisational projects with universities (44.0%).

## Level of funding

Audit form respondents for the current audit were asked to provide details of the level of funding they had received and the type of agency that had provided that funding for their project. The funding amounts for the 80 projects (5.9%) with available information are included in Table 21.<sup>39</sup> The table also shows the range, mean, median level of funding for these 80 projects.

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Minimum	\$600
Maximum	\$1,000,000
Mean	\$126,502
Median	\$65,500
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>\$10,120,183</b>

The total amount of funding was \$10,120,183; however, it should be noted that this amount is an underestimation of the full extent of research expenditure on projects that address the topic of

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that cross-organisational projects are not always preferable to projects undertaken by a single organisation. It is also important to note that while some projects identified through literature searches provided information about the organisation type conducting the project, if the abstract did not explicitly state that multiple organisations were conducting the project, the project was categorised as a single organisation project.

<sup>39</sup> Details of levels of funding were available for a total of 86 projects; however, 6 of those entries were below \$150. The 6 projects that listed a funding amount of less than \$150 were excluded from the analysis as it was assumed that the funding amounts were data entry errors (see footnote 12).

protecting Australia's children as the figure is only based on 5.9% of the total number of projects identified from this audit.

Table 22 provides a comparison of funding levels between those reported in the Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004), Higgins et al. (2005) and current audits. Keeping in mind the caveat discussed above, these data suggest that the average amount of funding for projects relating to the broad topic of protecting Australia's children was higher across the entire 1995–2010 period than the average amount for child protection and child abuse and neglect research in the 1995–2004 period, and much higher than the average amount for out-of-home care research for the 1995–2004 period. Note though that the current audit identified four projects with funding of \$700,000 or more, which increased the average amount overall.

The median level of funding also increased when compared to the two previous audits. Nevertheless, the difference between the mean and the median for the current audit indicates that although a small number of projects were receiving a significant amount of funding (i.e., \$700,000 or more), half were undertaken with less than \$65,500. The relatively low median level of funding may provide a partial explanation for why there is an abundance of small, qualitative studies in this field. In other words, large-scale, longitudinal studies require significant resources when compared to small-scale, qualitative research projects.

**Table 22 Comparison of project funding for all three audits**

	Total	Number	Mean	Median
Cashmore & Ainsworth (2004) <sup>a</sup>	\$3,900,000	94	\$41,489 <sup>a</sup>	\$29,500
Higgins et al. (2005) <sup>b</sup>	\$5,303,637	47	\$112,843	\$40,612
Current audit (2011) <sup>b</sup>	\$10,120,183	80	\$126,502	\$65,500

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) did not specify the average amount of funding. This amount was calculated by dividing the total amount of funding identified by the total number of projects identified ( $n = 94$ ). The funding levels for three of the projects identified by Cashmore and Ainsworth were not available; however, an estimate for these three projects was made, based upon the average amount of funding for the other 91 projects. <sup>b</sup> For both the Higgins et al. (2005) and the current audit, not all projects identified provided information about project funding.

## Source of funding

It was possible to identify the source of funding for 200 projects (14.7% of all projects) (Table 23).<sup>40</sup>

**Table 23 Distribution of projects, by type of organisation funding projects (where identified)**

Type of organisation funding project	No. (% of total projects where type of project identified)
State/territory or local governments	59 (29.5)
Commonwealth research granting agency (e.g., ARC, NH&MRC)	53 (26.5)
University	46 (23.0)
Self-funded	37 (18.5)
Other (e.g., non-government organisations, corporate donors and scholarships)	27 (13.5)
Philanthropic trust	21 (10.5)
<b>Total projects where type of organisation funding project is identified</b>	<b>200</b>

Notes: Percentages total more than 100% as more than one type of organisation could fund a project.

The most common type of organisation funding projects was state/territory governments (29.5%), followed by the Commonwealth government (26.5%), universities (23.0%), self-funding (18.5%), other (13.5%) and philanthropic organisations (10.5%). The significant proportion of projects funded by state/territory and/or Commonwealth governments is not surprising considering their extensive responsibility for the protection of children.

<sup>40</sup> The vast majority of these data are from the 2010 audit form entries. A very small number ( $n = 4$ ) of projects from other sources indicated funding source.

It is interesting to note that almost one in five projects were self-funded. The proportion of projects that included some level of self-funding almost doubled the proportion that were funded by philanthropic organisations (18.5% and 10.5% respectively).

The Higgins et al. (2005) audit, which covered the 1995–2004 period, identified a much larger proportion of projects funded by the Commonwealth government when compared to state/local government (26% and 18% respectively). In contrast, the current audit, covering the 1995–2010 period, identified a similar proportion of projects funded by state/territory and Commonwealth governments (29.5% and 26.5% respectively). If there had been an increase in the proportion of state/territory government funded projects during the 2006–10 period, compared to Commonwealth funded projects during this period, this may have explained the discrepancy between the findings of the current audit and the Higgins et al. (2005) audit. However, the information regarding changes over time for funding sources (see Table 24) suggests that the proportion of both state/territory government funded projects *and* Commonwealth funded projects increased significantly during the 2006–10 period; hence it is most likely that this particular discrepancy relates to the differing methodologies of the two audits.

Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) identified Australian Research Council funding specifically (categorised for the purposes of the current audit as “Commonwealth research granting agency”) and found an equal proportion of funding for ARC and state government funding. In as far as ARC funding represents funding from a Commonwealth research granting agency, Cashmore and Ainsworth’s findings are similar to those of the current audit.

Table 24 illustrates changes over time for sources of funding over the 1995–2010 period. Changes over time are represented according to the year the project was completed.

The findings from Table 24 show:

- The number of projects funded by all funding sources except philanthropic organisations increased significantly between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods.
- The number of projects funded by philanthropic organisations remained steady over the three time periods (between 3–4 projects).
- In the 2006–10 period, the number of projects funded by all funding sources was relatively similar (state/territory government funded = 17 projects; Commonwealth government = 20; universities = 14; self-funded projects = 16; and other funding source = 16), while the number of project funded by philanthropic organisations was significantly lower (4 projects only).

**Table 24 Change over time in distribution of projects, by type of organisation funding projects and year completed, 1995–2010 (where identified, *n* = 200)**

Discipline area	Year project completed <sup>a</sup>				Not yet completed ( <i>n</i> = 67)
	1995–2000 <sup>b</sup> ( <i>n</i> = 12)	2001–05 ( <i>n</i> = 26)	2006–10 ( <i>n</i> = 77)	Year not specified ( <i>n</i> = 18)	
	No. (% of total projects completed during period)				
State/territory or local governments	2 (16.7)	8 (30.8)	17 (22.1)	8 (44.4)	24 (35.8)
Commonwealth research granting agency (e.g., ARC, NH&MRC)	1 (8.3)	7 (26.9)	20 (26.0)	3 (16.7)	22 (32.8)
University	2 (16.7)	6 (23.1)	14 (18.2)	4 (22.2)	22 (32.8)
Self-funded	3 (25.0)	4 (15.4)	16 (20.8)	2 (11.1)	13 (19.4)
Other	1 (8.3)	0	16 (20.8)	1 (5.6)	10 (14.9)
Philanthropic trust	4 (33.3)	3 (11.5)	4 (5.2)	2 (11.1)	7 (10.4)

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year project completed was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified. <sup>b</sup> During this time period no projects had more than one source of funding. Percentages total more than 100% as projects (except in 1995–2000) could have more than one source of funding.

As with some of the other findings discussed above, it is important to note that this information regarding funding sources needs to be considered in light of the fact that data were only available for a small proportion of projects, in this case 14.7%.

## Projects conducted as part of a degree program

In total, 253 projects (18.6% of all projects) were identified as having been completed as part of a university degree program, of which 236 indicated the type of degree program involved (Table 25).

	<b>No. (% of total projects where degree program identified)</b>
Professional doctorates and PhDs	120 (47.4)
Masters degree	78 (30.8)
Honours course	35 (13.8)
Not specified	17 (6.7)
Other	3 (1.2)
<b>Total projects where degree program identified</b>	<b>253 (100)</b>

The most common type of degree being completed by researchers who were undertaking projects as part of a degree program was professional doctorates/PhDs (47.4%), followed by Masters degrees (30.8%) and Honours degrees (13.8%).<sup>41</sup> This is in keeping with the findings of the Higgins et al. (2005) audit, where professional doctorates/PhDs were also the most common category.

## 3.8 Project methodologies

### Qualitative and/or quantitative methodology

The audit team categorised the projects according to whether they utilised a qualitative and/or quantitative methodology. Due to time constraints, only those projects that explicitly stated which type of methodology was utilised were coded. The audit team identified 112 projects (8.2% of all projects) that explicitly stated which type of methodology was utilised. Of those 112 projects, the majority used a qualitative methodology, just over one quarter utilised both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and just over one in five used a quantitative methodology only (21.4%).

The comparatively high proportion of qualitative studies is consistent with Cashmore and Ainsworth's (2004) audit, which found that 52% of the research projects they identified were qualitative.<sup>42</sup> It is also consistent with the findings of the out-of-home care research studies by Bromfield & Osborn (2007) and Bromfield et al. (2005). Both reports noted an over-reliance on qualitative techniques among the out-of-home care projects they identified and that, as a consequence, the "evidence base [is] rich in detail, but [has] limited generalisability" (p. 104).

It is important to note that as only a very small proportion of projects (8.2%,  $n = 112$ ) had the relevant information available for determining the type of methodology used, these findings should not be viewed as being representative of the entire field of research that relates to the project of Australia's children. In terms of actual proportions, however, the findings do support the conclusions of similar projects that analysed the types of methodologies used within this research field (e.g., Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004; Bromfield et al., 2005; Bromfield & Osborn, 2007).

### Randomised control trials and longitudinal studies

Of the 1,359 projects identified in this audit, only four explicitly stated the use of a randomised control trial design. All four projects were completed during or after 2000; two were by the same author; and two were PhD projects. The topics of those randomised control trials were:

- a social support intervention on the health of mothers in the year after birth (Bogossian, 2003);

<sup>41</sup> A professional doctorate is designed to specifically meet the requirements of industry and professional groups.

<sup>42</sup> The Higgins et al. (2005) audit did not identify whether projects utilised qualitative and/or quantitative methodologies.

- home visiting as an early strategy for the prevention of abuse and neglect (Fraser, 2000);
- a home visiting intervention for vulnerable families with newborns (Fraser et al., 2000); and
- a treatment program for sexually abused children with posttraumatic stress disorder (King, 2000).

It has long been argued that it is difficult to introduce randomised control trials for interventions in the child welfare and child protection system due to ethical and practical dilemmas (Bromfield & Arney, 2008; Lamont, 2009), which may reflect why so few studies used this method.

The audit also found that 20 projects were longitudinal studies that collected data over a significant period of time, and three of these are ongoing. This is an encouraging number, given the extensive costs and resources involved in tracking participant developments over an extensive period of time. It is encouraging also to note the commencement in 2011 of the NSW Pathways of Care study of children and young people in out-of-home care (<[www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways)>). The aim of the study is to provide the knowledge needed to strengthen the out-of-home-care service system in NSW in order to improve the outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care. These outcomes include children's and young people's permanency, safety and wellbeing (including their physical health, socio-emotional and cognitive/learning development).

Longitudinal studies are important for observing changes in participants over several years rather than just at one point in time.

It is interesting to note that of the 20 longitudinal projects identified, 11 focus on out-of-home care. Therefore, while they only constitute 27.3% of all projects, out-of-home care research accounts for more than half of the longitudinal studies identified in the current audit.

## Sample type

In 443 projects (32.6% of all projects), there was sufficient information to identify the sample type (i.e., the source of data). Table 26 indicates the frequency of each sample type (one project could have more than one sample type) as a proportion of the total number of projects where sample type was indicated.

**Table 26 Distribution of projects, by sample type (for groups from which data were collected and where identified)**

Sample type	Number (% of total projects where sample type identified)
Professionals (e.g., child protection workers, welfare workers, health professionals)	179 (40.4)
Children	139 (31.4)
Parents	104 (23.5)
Foster carers	48 (10.8)
Kinship carers	33 (7.4)
Administrative dataset/s	28 (6.3)
Other adult individuals (e.g., ethnic community leaders, people who contacted a foster care agency) <sup>a</sup>	17 (3.8)
Other records (e.g., medical records, care and protection applications)	15 (3.4)
Families/Family members	11 (2.5)
Court cases/court files/other legal sources	10 (2.3)
Policies/policy documents/policy makers/procedure manuals	6 (1.4)
Other (e.g., medical records, news/media items, policies and legal cases/sentences/judgements)	35 (7.9)
<b>Total projects where sample type identified</b>	<b>443</b>

Notes: <sup>a</sup> This included people who had contacted a foster care agency, ethnic community leaders, adults who had been in care as children. Percentages total more than 100% as more than one sample type could be included in a project.

Notable findings from Table 26 include:

- The three most common sample types were professionals (40.4%), followed by children (31.4%) and parents (23.5%).
- Projects that included a sample of out-of-home carers were more likely to examine foster carers than kinship carers (10.8% and 7.4% respectively).

Of the 182 projects that used a sample of professionals, 166 (91.2%) indicated the type of professionals that were included in the sample. The results are outlined in Table 27.

<b>Table 27 Distribution of projects, by type of professionals in data samples (where identified)</b>	
<b>Type of professional</b>	<b>No. (% of total projects where type of professional identified)</b>
Child protection workers	82 (49.4%)
Welfare workers	79 (47.6%)
Health professionals	44 (26.5%)
Education professionals (including early childhood care and education)	30 (18.1%)
Legal professionals	17 (10.2%)
Other (e.g., police, juvenile justice workers, program managers)	32 (19.3%)
<b>Total projects where type of professional identified</b>	<b>166</b>

Note: Percentages total more than 100% as more than one type of professional could be included in the sample type for a single project.

The three most common types of professionals were child protection workers (49.4%), followed by welfare workers (47.6%) and health professionals (26.5%).

The Higgins et al. (2005) audit found a slightly higher proportion of projects with welfare/family support workers as the sample type (23%), compared to child protection workers (21%). Apart from these two specific professional types, Higgins et al. (2005) did not identify other professional types, therefore it is not possible to compare the findings of the two audits relating to types of professionals.

Of those projects that used a sample of parents, 87 indicated the “status” of those parents. The results are outlined in Table 28.

<b>Table 28 Distribution of projects, by status of parents in data samples (where identified)</b>	
<b>Status of parents</b>	<b>No. (% of total projects where parental status identified)</b>
At risk of abusing or neglecting their children or have abused or neglect their children	33 (37.9)
Other	29 (33.3)
Whose children are in out-of-home care	26 (29.9)
From the general community	20 (23.0)
<b>Total projects where parental status identified</b>	<b>87</b>

Notes: Percentages total more than 100% as more than one “type” of parent could be included in the sample type for a single project.

As outlined in Table 28, the most common status of parents in the parent sample were those at risk of abusing or neglecting their children or who had abused or neglected their children (37.9%), followed by other parents (33.3%), those parents whose children were in out-of-home care (29.9%), and parents from the general community (23.0%).

The Higgins et al. (2005) audit found a higher proportion of projects using a “community sample of parents” as the data source when compared to a “high-risk” individuals/families. However, the current audit found the opposite; that is, there were a higher proportion of projects using a sample of parents who were at risk of abusing or neglecting their children or who had abused or neglected their children.

## Sample size

For 288 projects (21.2% of all projects), there was sufficient information to identify sample size. Table 29 illustrates the frequency of the sample sizes, from very small (1–19) to large (500+).

Sample size	Number (% of the total projects where sample size identified)
Very small (1–19)	58 (20.1)
Small (20–99)	105 (36.5)
Medium (100–499)	83 (28.8)
Large (500+)	42 (14.6)
<b>Total projects where sample size identified</b>	<b>288 (100.0)</b>

These findings regarding sample size are very similar to the findings of the Higgins et al. (2005) audit; with the largest proportion of projects having a small sample size (36.5%), followed by medium (28.8%), very small (20.1%) and large (14.6%) sample sizes.

Table 30 illustrates changes over time for the sample sizes for the 288 projects where sample size was identified.

The findings outlined in Table 30 illustrate the following:

- Between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods, although there was an increase in the overall number of projects with a very small sample size (from 8 to 21), there was a decrease in the proportion of those projects (from 22.2% to 17.5%).
- Between the 1995–2000 and 2006–10 periods, although there was an increase in the overall number of projects with a small sample size (from 15 to 44), there was a decrease in the proportion of those projects (from 41.7% to 36.7%).
- The number of projects with a medium sample size increased (from 11 to 21), although the proportion of those projects remained very consistent over time (30.6%, 30.4% and 28.3% respectively).
- Both the number and proportion of projects using a large sample size increased over the three time periods (from 2 projects (5.6%) to 7 projects (10.1%) to 21 projects (17.5%).
- Despite a tendency towards small projects, there was a good variety of sample sizes, including those projects with a large (i.e., 500 samples or greater) sample size. These data are based, however, on the small number of projects with available information about sample size.

**Table 30 Change over time in distribution of projects, by sample size (where identified, *n* = 288)**

Sample size	Year project completed <sup>a</sup>				Not yet completed ( <i>n</i> = 57)
	1995–2000 ( <i>n</i> = 36)	2001–05 ( <i>n</i> = 69)	2006–10 ( <i>n</i> = 120)	Year not specified ( <i>n</i> = 6)	
	No. (% of total projects completed during period)				
Very small (1–19)	8 (22.2)	20 (29.0)	21 (17.5)	1 (16.7)	8 (14.0)
Small (20–99)	15 (41.7)	21 (30.4)	44 (36.7)	3 (50.0)	22 (38.6)
Medium (100–499)	11 (30.6)	21 (30.4)	34 (28.3)	1 (16.7)	16 (28.1)
Large (500+)	2 (5.6)	7 (10.1)	21 (17.5)	1 (16.7)	11 (19.3)

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Year project completed was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified. Percentage may not total 100.0% due to rounding.

## 3.10 Productivity/output

A total of 1,181 projects (86.9%) were recorded as having produced at least one “output”; that is, a report, journal article, conference paper, thesis, book, book chapter or other product

(e.g., newsletter article). This suggests that in most cases researchers in this field undertook some form of dissemination.<sup>43</sup>

Table 31 shows the total number of outputs for each output type and the number of projects that produced one of those output types. The table shows that of those projects that produced at least one output, the most common output was a report (29.7%), followed by a journal article (28.0%), a conference paper (18.8%), a thesis (11.7%), a book or book chapter (4.3%) and other (3.2%).

Type of output	No. of outputs	No. of projects producing the output	% of total projects
Report	422	403	29.7
Journal article	465	381	28.0
Conference paper	407	256	18.8
Thesis	161	159	11.7
Book/Book chapter	60	59	4.3
Other	50	44	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,565</b>	<b>1,181</b>	<b>1,359</b>

The information presented in Table 31 provides an indication of the extent of dissemination of project research. Information regarding nearly one-third of projects was disseminated via a report, although some of those reports may not be publicly available. In addition, information regarding more than a quarter of the projects was disseminated via a journal article. Almost one in five presented information relating to their research at a conference.

### 3.11 Issues relating to Indigenous Australians

The audit identified 214 projects (15.7% of all projects) that addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians, which range from projects that focus solely upon Indigenous Australians to those that discuss the implications of the research for Indigenous populations.<sup>44</sup> Table 32 shows the change over time in the projects that addressed Indigenous Australians as a proportion of the total number of projects identified for this audit.

Year project completed <sup>a</sup>	No. (% of total projects completed during period)	Total projects during period
1995–2000	20 (5.1)	389
2001–05	36 (8.2)	438
2006–10	102 (26.2)	390
Not completed at time of audit	44(53.7)	82
Year not specified	12 (20.0)	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>214 (15.7%)</b>	<b>1,359</b>

Note: <sup>a</sup> Year project completed was either the year identified by audit form respondents or year of the publication from which the project was identified.

<sup>43</sup> The remaining projects either did not identify any outputs (received via the audit form) or insufficient information was available to identify outputs.

<sup>44</sup> The proportion of projects that addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians (15.7%) differs from the proportion that addressed issues relating to supporting outcome 5 of the National Framework (Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities) (1.3%) (see page 16). This is because supporting outcome 5 has a much narrower focus, specifically: how to address Indigenous disadvantage (e.g., housing); community-wide strategies to address alcohol misuse and family violence; community-led or community-identified solutions to protecting children; Indigenous children in OOHHC maintaining connection to family, community and culture; and partnerships between government, service providers and Indigenous families/communities that relate to protecting children (see Table 1). Those projects that addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians covered a much broader scope (see footnote 45).

These findings suggest that over time there has been a very notable increase in the proportion of projects relating to the protection of Indigenous children, from 5.1% of all projects completed in the 1995–2000 period to 26.2% in the 2006–10 period (more than a five-fold increase).<sup>45</sup>

In 2004, Cashmore and Ainsworth noted a lack of out-of-home care research that addresses Indigenous children. Of the 371 projects that addressed out-of-home care, 89 (24.0%) addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians. Of the 778 projects that addressed child abuse and neglect, 104 (13.4%) addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians. This data suggest that issues relating to Indigenous Australians are more commonly addressed in research relating to out-of-home care rather than that relating to child abuse and neglect.

### 3.12 Other population groups

In order to determine the extent to which research is addressing the diversity of the Australian population, the audit team coded projects according to whether they referred to any of the following population groups:

- children with a disability;
- families from CALD backgrounds; and
- adolescents.

The results are presented in Table 33.

<b>Population group</b>	<b>Number (% of total projects)</b>
Adolescents	49 (3.6)
Children with a disability	38 (2.8)
CALD families	30 (2.2)
Total projects	1,359 (8.6)

As outlined in Table 33 fewer than one in ten projects (8.6%) referred to one of these population groups, suggesting that the extent to which research relating to protecting Australia’s children addresses the diversity of Australia’s population is limited.

Considering the fact that children with a disability have a higher risk of being abused or neglected than other children (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000; Westat, 1993), it would seem that there is a need for more research on this specific population group. In 2004, Cashmore and Ainsworth identified research about this particular population group as a content gap in the field of out-of-home care research (p. 24).

There is limited research regarding cultural issues within statutory child protection services in Australia, including the needs of children and families from CALD backgrounds within child protection services (Sawrikar, 2009), and the assessment of families from CALD backgrounds (Kaur, 2007). Considering these issues, a focus upon this specific population group would appear to be justified. Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) also identified research about this population group as a content gap (p. 24).

Adolescents are an important subgroup to consider in this context, especially in relation to child protection services and out-of-home care. Adolescents in the child protection system may have experienced repeated exposure to trauma and, for many, the trauma of maltreatment is compounded by experiences such as the death of a parent or separation from siblings (Robinson & Miller, 2010). Only a small proportion of projects addressed issues relating to adolescents (3.6%).

<sup>45</sup> The audit team coded projects as addressing issues relating to Indigenous Australians if the title or abstract referred to Indigenous Australians (or “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders” and other similar terms). It could be argued that without analysing complete publications, it is spurious to make conclusions about the number of projects that addressed the issue of Indigenous Australians. However, the abstract of a publication is typically a summary of the key issues addressed, and so should have been a good indication of whether Indigenous issues formed a significant area of focus in the project. Audit form respondents themselves identified whether their project addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians.

## 4 Conclusion

This audit identified a total of 1,359 projects undertaken in Australia during the 1995–2010 period on topics of relevance to the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children. Some key characteristics of this body of research are:

- there was a much higher proportion of projects that were research compared with those with an evaluation component (79.5% and 19.6% respectively);
- there was a much higher proportion of projects addressing National Framework supporting outcome 4 (children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing) (83.9%), compared to the proportion that addressed any of the other individual supporting outcomes;
- of those projects that addressed child abuse and neglect, a much higher proportion of projects addressed sexual abuse when compared to those that addressed physical abuse, neglect or psychological maltreatment (26.2%, 5.8%, 4.6% and 3.6% respectively);
- a significant proportion of projects were funded by state governments, a Commonwealth research granting agency, government or universities;
- the majority of projects had a small or medium sample size (65.3%);
- the number and proportion of projects that addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians increased over time; and
- very few projects focused on adolescents, children/parents with a disability or families with a CALD background (only 8.6% of the total number of projects).

Whereas the earlier discussion focused on the characteristics of the research identified, the following discussion synthesises these findings in order to explore what analysis of these audit data can tell us about:

- research gaps and areas for development; and
- outcomes and progress since previous audits.

### 4.1 Research gaps and areas for development

One of the key functions of this audit is to identify those areas where there are significant gaps in knowledge regarding the protection of Australia’s children. Based on the findings of the audit, the following discussion incorporates four key types of gaps:

- *content gaps*: subjects that are under-researched, with particular consideration given to those topics addressed in the National Framework;
- *population group gaps*: population groups that are under-researched;
- *methodological gaps*: methodologies that are under-utilised; and
- *data gaps*: data that are not available.

#### Content gaps

##### *Community education*

There is a content gap in relation to the roles and effectiveness of community education regarding child abuse and neglect, parenting, child development and children’s needs. Community education regarding this topic is identified in the National Framework as a key means of protecting children from abuse and neglect, supporting families and encouraging a shared understanding and responsibility for the problem of abuse and neglect. International research demonstrates that community education, through methods such as social marketing, can lead to improvements in knowledge of child abuse and neglect and behaviours and attitudes towards children (Horsfall, Bromfield, & McDonald, 2010). However, the findings from this audit suggest that there has been minimal research on this topic in Australia in the past 16 years. There have also been few evaluations of community education programs (6.6% of all evaluation projects), which therefore limits our understanding of the effectiveness of these types of programs.

If, child abuse and neglect is “everyone’s business”, as researchers, child welfare advocates and policy-makers consistently argue, then people need to learn about what child abuse and neglect is, how to identify it, how to respond to it and, perhaps most importantly, how to support children and families in order to ultimately prevent child maltreatment. Research evidence is needed to understand whether (and how) community education can assist with this.

### ***Risk factors***

Domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness have been consistently recognised as the key risk factors for abuse and neglect (Higgins & Katz, 2008; Bromfield, Lamont, Parker, & Horsfall, 2010). They are the drivers of the increased demand for statutory child protection services over the past decade. This audit found that of all these risk factors, domestic violence has been by far the most commonly researched topic; that is, research pertaining specifically to children, families and parenting and domestic violence has been much more common than research pertaining to children, families and parenting and substance abuse or mental illness.

It is perhaps not surprising that a search for projects relating to domestic violence and families would uncover a significant number of projects considering the way in which domestic violence is conceptualised (i.e., as a “family” problem, and often referred to as “family violence”). Nevertheless, considering the strength of evidence regarding the risks that parental substance abuse and mental illness pose to children’s safety and wellbeing, the relatively few projects addressing these two issues—compared to domestic violence—suggests a significant knowledge gap.

The research relating to risk factors primarily focuses upon a single specific risk factor (e.g., substance abuse *or* mental illness *or* domestic violence) rather than multiple risk factors. This is significant in itself, as research demonstrates that these risk factors often co-exist (Bromfield et al., 2010; Dawe, Harnett & Frye, 2008). Furthermore, most of the research relating to risk factors pertains to the impact of those risk factors on children, and supporting children and families who are experiencing these difficulties (including improving service responses), rather than the actual identification or prevalence of risk factors.

The annual reports of the Victorian Child Death Review Committee (e.g., Victorian Child Death Review Committee, 2008, 2009) are an exception to this rule, as they provide information about the prevalence of risk factors among children and young people who died who were current or recent clients of child protection services.

### ***Maltreatment types***

As far as Australian research that focused upon a specific type of maltreatment is concerned, sexual abuse is a much more common focus than any other specific maltreatment type. Compared to sexual abuse, the other forms of maltreatment (physical abuse, neglect and psychological maltreatment) continue to receive less attention from researchers. Although there is some indication that the proportion of projects addressing these topics has increased slightly, they still do not reflect the prevalence of those maltreatment types within the Australian community.

In 2009–10, in all jurisdictions except Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the most common type of substantiated notification was emotional abuse (AIHW, 2011). In Western Australia and the Northern Territory, neglect was the most common type of substantiated abuse (AIHW, 2011). Yet, over the 1995–2010 period, these were the least likely of all types of maltreatment to be the focus of research (emotional abuse: 3.6%; neglect: 4.6%). Similarly, in 2009–10, in all states and territories except Western Australia, sexual abuse was the least common type of substantiated abuse (AIHW, 2011), yet over the 1995–2010 period, sexual abuse was the type of maltreatment that received the most individual attention (26.6%).

Although there are some problems with using child protection service data as a proxy for child maltreatment prevalence (e.g., the data only includes cases of maltreatment that were detected and reported and, as such, are likely to be an underestimation of the actual number of children who are abused or neglected), these data are the best available indicator that we currently have of the extent of the problem of child abuse and neglect in Australia (Bromfield & Horsfall, 2010). Therefore, the lack of focus on emotional abuse, neglect and physical abuse within the research is of significant concern.

A recent audit of child protection research in Ireland reported similar findings. Irish child protection research has a strong focus on sexual abuse (Buckley, Corrigan & Kerris, 2010). While neglect is the most commonly reported form of abuse in Ireland, the proportion of research on neglect is low compared to the proportion of research on sexual abuse. In Ireland, physical and emotional abuse are reported marginally less than sexual abuse but, the authors concluded, physical and emotional abuse topics still “appear to be under-researched” (p. ii).

In addition to sexual abuse being the most common type of maltreatment addressed in research, perpetrators/offenders of sexual abuse also appear to be a common theme in research addressing the issue of child abuse and neglect. Of all projects that addressed child abuse and neglect, 4.0% addressed this topic. On its own, this figure is not significant, but when considering that research looking at the perpetrators of other maltreatment types were not numerous enough to justify inclusion as a specific category, this seems to support the argument that there is a gap in the research on other maltreatment types.

While there is increasing recognition internationally that maltreatment types do not occur in isolation, many Australian researchers continue to focus on single maltreatment types, without considering the co-existence of other forms of maltreatment and their potential contribution to the issues observed (Higgins, 2004).

Those projects that do address all types of maltreatment are primarily annual government reports (such as the annual AIHW child protection reports; e.g., AIHW, 2011), or they relate to support for children who have been abused, or workforce, practice and system issues. Few projects that address all types of maltreatment focus upon the impact of the abuse on children, risk assessment or prevalence of abuse. This suggests a significant content gap in relation to the prevalence, impact and assessment of multiple forms of maltreatment. Few studies specifically address the overlap in children and young people’s experience of multiple types of maltreatment and its unique cumulative or interactive impact.

### *Issues relating to Indigenous Australians*

The audit findings suggest that research addressing issues relating to Indigenous Australians has increased significantly over the past 16 years; from 5.1% of total research projects in 1995–2000 to 26.2% in 2006–10.<sup>46</sup> Overall, it appears that issues relating to Indigenous Australians were more commonly addressed in research relating to out-of-home care than that relating to child abuse and neglect. This reflects the reality that Indigenous children are over-represented in the out-of-home care system (Berlyn & Bromfield, 2010).

Although 15.7% of projects overall addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians, only 1.3% directly addressed the topics that are the focus of supporting outcome 5 (see Table 1):

- how to address Indigenous disadvantage (e.g., housing);
- community-wide strategies to address alcohol misuse and family violence;
- community-led or community-identified solutions to protecting children;
- Indigenous children in OOHC maintaining connection to family, community and culture; and
- partnerships between government, service providers and Indigenous families/communities that relate to protecting children.

This suggests that there are significant gaps and areas for development specifically in relation to these topics in research relating to Indigenous Australians. These findings are consistent with other reports noting the evidence gaps in this area (Higgins, 2010).

These specific gaps are significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, entrenched social problems in some Indigenous communities (especially poor housing) may play a role in the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection and out-of-home care services (Berlyn & Bromfield, 2010); therefore research on how to address Indigenous disadvantage (rather than research that

<sup>46</sup> Although the research addressed issues relating to Indigenous Australians, that does not mean it was exclusively focused upon Indigenous children, young people or abuse in Indigenous communities.

simply identifies or measures the disadvantage) is critical to reducing the over-representation of Indigenous children in these services.<sup>47</sup>

The Closing the Gap initiative represents a positive step towards identifying how to address Indigenous disadvantage (COAG, 2010). Furthermore, the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse has developed a research and evaluation register specifically for the purpose of identifying research relating to this issue (<[www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap](http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap)>).

Secondly, the ability of Indigenous communities to function in a self-determining way is widely viewed as a critical factor in protecting Indigenous children from maltreatment (Cuneen & Libesman, 2000; Higgins, 2010). Partnerships between Indigenous communities and governments and/or service providers are critical also, in recognition of the fact that a “top-down” approach is not effective (Higgins, 2010). More research is required to bridge the gap regarding this specific content area. Research that demonstrates the effectiveness of self-determination and partnerships appears to be an area that could be addressed.

Lastly, maintaining Indigenous children’s connection to culture when they are in out-of-home care is critical to effectively meet the needs of Indigenous children (Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins, & Richardson, 2006). Establishing and maintaining these connections through initiatives such as the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle recognises the damaging impact of previous government policies that undermined them (Berlyn & Bromfield, 2010).

### *Out-of-home care*

In 2004, Cashmore and Ainsworth highlighted the “almost exclusive focus upon foster care” (p. 24) within Australian out-of-home care research. Noting that this lack of attention is “understandable in the sense that there are few options other than family based foster care in Australian and very little residential care” (p. 24), the authors nevertheless identified kinship care as a “possible priority” for a future research agenda.

The findings from the current audit demonstrate that foster care continues to dominate research about out-of-home care when compared to research addressing kinship care. As kinship care is the fastest growing type of out-of-home care in Australia (McHugh, 2009), there is an obvious knowledge gap regarding this specific type of care situation. Issues such as whether kinship care leads to better outcomes compared to foster care (e.g., greater placement stability) are critical considering the increased reliance upon kinship care in Australia.

Another “possible priority” identified by Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) was permanency planning. In the current audit, only a small number of projects addressed issues relating to reunification and permanency planning ( $n = 15$ ), and a very small number of projects addressed adoption from out-of-home care ( $n = 3$ ). Combined, this constitutes just 4.9% of the total projects that addressed issues relating to out-of-home care. Permanency planning, therefore, also appears to still be a significant knowledge gap.

### *Evaluations*

Overall, the proportion of projects that were evaluations of programs, services or strategies, when compared to research projects, was small (19.6% to 79.5% respectively).<sup>48</sup> This is a concern considering that program evaluations, especially impact and outcome evaluations, can determine whether or not interventions are of benefit to participants and are cost-effective (Holzer, Higgins, Bromfield, & Higgins, 2006).

Although some types of programs are more commonly evaluated than others (e.g., family support programs, prevention programs for children, and tertiary intervention programs for child victims), overall, the low proportion of projects that were evaluations suggests that there is a knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of programs. The lower proportion of evaluation projects could

<sup>47</sup> It is important to note, however, that statistics regarding the number of Indigenous children involved in child protection and out-of-home care services should not be viewed as an accurate representation of actual levels of abuse and neglect, as it does not include children who have been abused or neglected but who have not come to the attention of the statutory child protection department (Berlyn & Bromfield, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> The proportion of evaluation projects includes those projects that include both research and evaluation components.

be attributed to the recognised difficulties for service providers in conducting outcome and impact evaluations, such as a lack of resources (Tomison & Poole, 2000).

The high proportion of projects received via the 2005 and 2010 audit forms that were evaluations (36.2%), when compared to the proportion of evaluation projects overall (17.2%) (most of which were identified via published research) suggests that while evaluations are being undertaken, they are not being published. As noted by Higgins et al. (2005), the publication of evaluation results may not be a high priority for organisations undertaking evaluations, but this is an important way to share information about what works and prevent unnecessary replication of efforts that might have been shown not to work.

## Population group gaps

Although research relating to Indigenous Australians is becoming more prominent, the full extent of the diversity of Australia's population is not reflected in research addressing the protection of Australia's children.

Children with a disability continue to be an under-researched population, despite the fact that they are at a higher risk of abuse and neglect than children without a disability (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000; Westat, 1993). Considering the cultural diversity of Australia's population, and the significant cultural issues within child protection services (Sawrikar, 2007; Kaur, 2007), research regarding CALD families and the protection of children also appears to be a significant gap. The significant challenges that adolescents face within child protection systems and out-of-home care have received some attention; however, overall, the proportion of projects focusing on that subgroup is relatively small (Robinson, 2010).

## Methodological gaps

As far as Australian research that focuses upon a specific type of maltreatment is concerned (i.e., one or more of the five maltreatment types), sexual abuse is a much more common focus than any other specific maltreatment type. Leading researchers and advocates commenting on research within the fields of child welfare and child protection in Australia have consistently noted the abundance of small, qualitative research projects and the comparative shortage of larger scale, longitudinal, quantitative research projects (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004; Bromfield & Osborn, 2007; Cashmore, Higgins, Bromfield & Scott, 2006). The findings from this audit support this assertion, as there were:

- more qualitative than quantitative projects;
- few longitudinal studies; and
- very few randomised control trials.

As noted previously however, only a very small proportion of projects had the relevant information available to determine the type of methodology used; therefore, these findings should not be viewed as being representative of the entire field of research that relates to the protection of Australia's children. The fact that previous audits have made similar findings suggests that this finding is indicative of the overall body of research. As a result of the lack of large-scale, longitudinal, quantitative research projects, it is difficult to identify cause and effect relationships, track impacts on children and families of events over time, identify critical factors such as prevalence and incidence, and produce findings that can be applied to the general population. The lack of randomised control trials limits the extent to which the effectiveness of programs and interventions can be identified. There are, however, challenges associated with this type of research within the field of child welfare research.<sup>49</sup>

In regard to longitudinal studies, Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) called for a "national or cross-state longitudinal study of children and young people in the child protection and care systems" (p. 26). The South Australian longitudinal study, a data source used to undertake a number of quantitative studies identified in this audit, while not national in scale, points to a positive direction in Australian research. However, apart from projects using this particular dataset, longitudinal

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<sup>49</sup> These challenges include difficulties recruiting families with multiple and complex problems, the high mobility of these types of families, ethical dilemmas surrounding the suspicion or disclosure of abuse, and difficulties investigating causal relationships considering the complex nature and multiple pathways to child abuse and neglect (Bromfield & Arney, 2008).

research is uncommon.<sup>50</sup> A notable exception is the NSW Pathways of Care study of children and young people in out-of-home care (see section on Randomised control trials and longitudinal studies).

More longitudinal research is required across the board; however, there is some indication that there is more longitudinal research being conducted within the field of out-of-home care, when compared to the fields of child maltreatment and child protection services research.

## Data gaps

The content gaps identified above can only be overcome if reliable and accessible data are available. The accessibility of data was a key issue noted in the Towards a National Research Agenda forum (AIFS, 2009). Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) also identified the need for data repositories that enable researchers to carry out secondary analyses of existing data. Access to case-level data (rather than aggregate data) is also a significant concern for researchers working in the area (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004). Developing unit record data relating to the statutory child protection system is one of the priorities noted in the document *Implementing the First Three-Year Action Plan 2009–2010* (the first of the three-year action plans under the National Framework; COAG, 2009a). This will allow state/territory departments and other researchers to undertake more detailed analyses of the data.

It is difficult to determine from the audit findings whether certain content gaps relate to a lack of interest and/or expertise on the behalf of researchers or to a lack of reliable and accessible data. For example, the lack of research on CALD families could relate to the fact that child protection services do not record the cultural background of families unless they are from an Indigenous background (Sawrikar, 2007). This makes it difficult for researchers to address, for example, the prevalence of families from a CALD background coming into contact with child protection services.

Furthermore, the type of research that can be conducted is limited by the datasets available. Many of the research priorities identified during the Towards a National Research Agenda forum would benefit from longitudinal data. The lack of longitudinal research in Australia relates not only to the difficulties of undertaking longitudinal research, but also to the lack of reliable and accessible longitudinal administrative datasets. As noted in the forum, researchers need access to Australian longitudinal data that specifically focuses upon disadvantaged and vulnerable children and their potential for experiencing abuse and neglect.

## 4.2 Outcomes and progress since previous audits

Table 34 compares the findings from the Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) audit, the Higgins et al. (2005) audit and the current audit.

Some of the areas where there are notable differences are:

- the specific maltreatment types addressed;
- types of organisations conducting projects;
- degree programs;
- level of funding; and
- sources of funding.

It is difficult to make meaningful conclusions based upon the differences between the three audits, primarily because of their differing methodologies. Self-selection, inconsistent use of coding categories by audit form respondents and the aforementioned limitations of relying upon abstracts to glean information about projects may have resulted in many of the differences identified in Table 34.

As an illustration, clearly one of most significant differences relates to maltreatment types. The Higgins et al. (2005) audit identified much larger proportions of projects addressing each of the different specific maltreatment types (e.g., 82.2% of projects addressed sexual abuse, compared to 27% for the current audit; 84.4% addressed physical abuse, compared to 6%). Furthermore, whereas

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<sup>50</sup> For more information about the South Australian longitudinal study, see Bromfield & Osborn (2007).

**Table 34 Outcomes and progress since previous audits**

	<b>Cashmore &amp; Ainsworth<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Higgins et al.<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>All projects (1995–2010)</b>
Types of programs evaluated	N/A	Similar proportion of projects evaluated tertiary intervention programs, statutory child protection services and parent education programs	A much higher proportion of projects evaluated tertiary evaluation programs when compared to those that evaluated statutory child protection services and parent education programs
Projects about sexual abuse	N/A	82.2% of projects addressed sexual abuse	26.2% addressed sexual abuse
Projects about family violence	N/A	62.2% addressed witnessing family violence	16.1% addressed family violence
Projects about physical abuse	N/A	84.4% addressed physical abuse	5.8% addressed physical abuse
Projects about neglect	N/A	78.5% addressed neglect	4.6% addressed neglect
Projects about psychological maltreatment	N/A	80% addressed psychological maltreatment	3.6% addressed psychological maltreatment
Discipline areas of chief investigators	N/A	Social work is the most common discipline area Social policy more common than psychology Education more common than sociology	Social work is the most common discipline area Psychology more common than social policy Sociology more common than education
Geographic focus of projects	N/A	N/A	Distribution proportionate to population across the states/territories
Types of organisations conducting projects	Most conducted by universities or NGOs (69%), either alone or in partnership	Universities are the most common type of organisation conducting projects (61%), followed by government departments/hospitals (48%) The proportion of projects conducted by NGOs is not identified, only the proportion conducted by “agencies” (15%) 31.3% of projects are collaborations between two different types of organisations	A similar proportion of government and universities are conducting projects (48.5% and 48.2% respectively) Almost one-third of projects are conducted by NGOs (32.7%)
Level of funding	Overall funding: \$3.5 m Median funding level: \$29,500	Overall funding: \$5.3m Median funding level: \$40,612 Mean funding level: \$112,843	Overall funding: \$10.1 m Median funding level: \$65,500 Mean funding level: \$126,502
Source of funding	Australian Research Council and state government the most common funding source	Commonwealth research grant agencies the most common source (26%), with state/local government constituting 18% of sources	State government and Commonwealth government constitute a very similar proportion of funding sources (29.5% and 27.0% respectively)
Projects completed as part of a degree program	N/A	39% of projects conducted as part of a formal university degree program Projects completed as part of a professional doctorate or PhD program constituted 24% of all projects completed as part of a formal university degree program Masters degree constituted 10% of all projects completed as part of a formal university degree program	18.6% of projects conducted as part of a formal university degree program Projects completed as part of a professional doctorate or PhD program constituted 47.4% of all projects completed as part of a formal university degree program Projects completed as part of a Masters degree constituted 30.8% of all projects where degree type was identified

continued on page 46

Table 34 (cont.)

	Cashmore & Ainsworth <sup>a</sup>	Higgins et al. <sup>b</sup>	All projects (1995–2010)
Methodologies	An over-reliance on qualitative methodologies	The proportion overall of qualitative and quantitative projects was not identified	An over-reliance on qualitative methodologies
Sample types	Half the studies collected data directly from children and young people Slightly less than half (47.8%) collected data directly from “workers”	Just less than a quarter of projects (24%) collected data directly from children Roughly equal proportions of child protection and welfare workers in data samples (21% and 23% respectively) Slightly higher proportion of community sample of parents (31%) than child protection and high-risk families (27% combined)	Almost a third (31.4%) of projects collected data directly from children Roughly equal proportions of child protection and welfare workers in data samples (49.4 and 47.6% respectively) A higher proportion of parents at risk of abusing or neglecting their children or have abused or neglected their children (37.9%) than parents from the general community (23.0%)
Sample size	Over-reliance on small samples (median size: 24 for qualitative projects; 121 for quantitative studies)	Most projects were small (20–99) (33%) or very small (1–19)	Most projects were small (20–99) (36.5%) or medium (100–499) (28.8%)
Productivity/output	Thirty-nine studies (41%) had been published—12 as state government reports, 12 as journal articles, 8 as agency reports, 7 as conference presentations	From 135 projects, a total of 62 journal articles, 47 conference proceedings, 27 books/book chapters, 18 government reports, 13 other (e.g., theses) and 12 NGO/agency reports	From 1,359 projects, a total of 422 reports, 465 journal articles, 407 conferences paper, 161 theses, 60 books/book chapters and 50 other outputs

Note: <sup>a</sup> *Audit of Australian Out-of-Home Care Research* (2004). <sup>b</sup> *National Audit of Australian Child Protection Research 1995–2004* (2005).

the current audit identified a comparatively larger proportion of projects relating to sexual abuse when compared to most other maltreatment types, the Higgins et al. (2005) audit did not.

These differences are likely to be the result of differing methodologies, rather than any significant outcome or progress over the last five years. In their analysis of maltreatment for the 2005 audit, Higgins et al. (2005) relied solely on the information received via the audit form. Information about projects received via the audit form provide more detail than information about projects identified through abstracts. This may have influenced the difference between the findings of the two audits—audit form respondents for the 2005 audit were simply able to provide more detailed information. By coding information on all projects with available information for the current audit ( $n = 489$ ), we were able to include a much larger body of research in the analysis of maltreatment types.

Higgins et al. (2005) also identified that the information received via the audit form may not be accurate as “the validity of categorisations assigned by some respondents [to the 2005 audit form] may be questionable” (p. 26). Hence, this limitation of the Higgins et al. (2005) methodology may have affected their findings regarding the number of projects addressing specific types of maltreatment; hence the reason for the change in method for the current audit.

For these reasons, the best way of assessing progress since the time previous audits were conducted is to compare the different time periods within the current audit. The key changes over time include:

- a decrease in projects that focus upon sexual abuse;
- a slight increase in the proportion of projects that focus upon physical abuse, neglect and psychological maltreatment;

- an increase in the proportion of projects that address all types of maltreatment;
- an increase in the proportion of projects that address out-of-home care;
- a substantial increase in the proportion of projects undertaken by researchers from the discipline of social work and a gradual decrease in the proportion of projects undertaken by researchers from the discipline of psychology; and
- a substantial increase in the proportion of projects that address issues relating to Indigenous Australians.

### 4.3 Implications for research and researchers

The implications of the findings of the current audit for research and researchers relate both to knowledge gaps and infrastructure. In relation to knowledge gaps, in the past it may have been difficult for researchers working in the field of child welfare to identify exactly which topics were most relevant and of the highest priority to policy-makers and practitioners. By synthesising the needs of practitioners and policy-makers, the development of a national research agenda (one of the national priorities for 2009–12 implementation plan for the National Framework (COAG, 2009a) could enable researchers to identify exactly what type of evidence is needed in order to improve outcomes for Australia’s children.

Another key implication for research and researchers in relation to knowledge gaps are the challenges associated with conducting research within the child welfare field. Challenges such as ethical dilemmas surrounding the suspicion or disclosure of abuse, and difficulties investigating causal relationships (Bromfield & Arney, 2008), make it difficult to employ the types of methodologies and research designs identified as lacking in Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004), Higgins et al. (2005) and the current audit. However, these methodologies are critical to answering many of the research questions identified above.

In regard to infrastructure, there are a number of key points to make. Firstly, Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) noted that: “the future of research depends on the development of a new generation of researchers to replace the small number of established researchers” (p. 50). There appears to be a new generation of potential emerging researchers in this field, with almost one in five projects (18.5%) completed as part of a degree program.

However, in order to attract and retain a new generation of researchers after they have completed their degrees, there needs to be adequate funding and infrastructure available for universities and other institutes and organisations in order to continue to support research endeavours. There is evidence to suggest that much research is conducted on a small budget and, in some cases, with no external funding whatsoever. This affects not only the type of research that can be done (i.e., small-scale qualitative studies are usually much less expensive than large-scale longitudinal studies), but also the attraction and retention of new researchers.

### 4.4 Implications for policy and practice

Policy-makers and practitioners require research-based evidence in order to bring about improved outcomes for children, as Bromfield and Arney (2008) pointed out:

It is vital that interventions with vulnerable children and their families are accountable, that they actually work and, at the very least, that they do no further harm. (p. 11)

The implications of the content and methodological gaps identified above are that the evidence base that policy-makers and practitioners rely upon is limited, thereby affecting their ability to bring about improved outcomes for Australia’s children.

Although international research can be relevant to policy-makers and practitioners, some of the unique characteristics of the Australian context (e.g., geographical size, remote regions, Indigenous cultures, other intersecting social and economic systems relating to health, income support and so on) mean that research relating specifically to the Australian context is required.

As the work of policy-makers and practitioners relies upon research, the dissemination of research findings is a critical issue. Whereas much research identified through the audit has been published, the publication of research findings in journal articles or the presentation of findings at academic

conferences is not always the best way of disseminating research to policy-makers and practitioners. The Protecting Australia's Children Research and Evaluation Register, is an important step towards making research more accessible to these audiences (see section 5).

## 4.5 Limitations

The current audit relied upon literature searches as the main method for identifying projects that met the inclusion criteria, in recognition of the limitations of relying solely upon audit form data for the purposes of analysis. It was expected that gathering data via both a library search and the audit form would provide a more complete, comprehensive picture of research being undertaken when compared to an audit that relied solely upon individuals manually entering information in an online audit form.

One of the limitations of data sourced via a library search is that they do not provide the same level of detail as audit form responses (as only abstracts were reviewed). As Higgins et al. (2005) noted, reviewing entire documents is a time-consuming and expensive process and this was not possible with the resources available for the current audit. In some cases, the abstract did not provide enough information to determine whether those projects met the inclusion criteria for the audit, and thus they were not included in the audit. There is a possibility therefore that some projects that met the inclusion criteria were not included in the audit.

One of the drawbacks of relying upon two separate groups (i.e., project researchers and the audit team) to categorise projects is that there may be some inconsistencies between the two. As noted previously, a number of audit form respondents identified their project as addressing the topic of the "prevention of child abuse and neglect", yet when asked whether their project addressed the issue of child abuse and neglect, they responded "No". A limitation of the audit form was that it did not "pre-fill" responses to questions such as these.

Another limitation of the audit form was that it did not include a question that enabled an analysis of geographical gaps. Audit form respondents were asked to identify in which state or territory the researchers undertaking the project were based; however, it did not ask them about the geographical focus of the project (e.g., specific state/territory focus, rural and remote focus). A preliminary analysis of the title and abstracts of all 1,359 projects (by searching, for example, for the names of specific states/territories) identified 387 projects where a single specific state or territory was identified. These data were deemed invalid, however, as projects that did not include information about geographic focus in the title or abstract of their project may have been missed.

## 4.6 Implications for future audits of research

Research audits are intended to provide an indication of the extent, characteristics (e.g., subtopics, methodology, funding body) and quality of research pertaining to a particular topic. For research audits with a relatively broad scope, such as this one, there are a number of key issues to consider:

- An audit form that is made available to researchers to record the details of their research is unlikely to capture all research that has been undertaken about a topic if that topic is relatively broad in scope (e.g., protecting Australia's children). Even when an intensive process of promotion that targets key organisations is undertaken, some relevant research will not be captured, either because the relevant parties are not aware of the audit or do not have time to complete an audit form.
- Research audits that combine an audit form and a literature search are likely to provide a more comprehensive picture of the extent of research pertaining to a particular topic when compared to audits that rely solely upon an audit form.
- Audit forms are especially useful for capturing information about unpublished research (e.g., research currently being undertaken), as this research will not be captured via traditional literature search methods.
- The need to capture detailed information about research via an audit form needs to be balanced with the understanding that researchers' time is limited. The more complex and detailed an audit form is, the less willing researchers will be to complete it.

- Information provided via an audit form can appear inconsistent. For this reason, it would be extremely beneficial for audit forms to be designed to minimise inconsistencies (e.g., where a respondent notes their project is about the prevention of abuse and neglect, the question about whether their project addresses child abuse and neglect is automatically answered as “Yes”).
- In order to identify geographical gaps, the audit form needs to explicitly ask if the research focuses on a specific region (e.g., state or territory), as the other material pertaining to the project (e.g., title, aim/purpose and findings) may not include this information.
- In order to identify the characteristics (e.g., methodology) and quality of research, it is necessary to have available relevant information about that research. Identifying this information by referring to a full publication (e.g., journal article, research report) is an extremely time-consuming process as it requires audit team members to review a vast amount of material. The more extensive the scope of the topic, the more time-consuming this process will be. Moreover, using this method of identifying relevant information requires access to full-text publications, and this capacity is limited among organisations that exist outside a university context. An audit is not a substitute for a systematic review of particular content areas.
- Identifying relevant information by referring to publication abstracts is a more efficient method of identifying the characteristics and quality of research. However, abstracts do not always contain all the relevant information (e.g., only 8.2% of projects identified for the current project explicitly stated whether they used a qualitative and/or quantitative methodology) and not all abstracts are publicly available, thus restricting the extent to which the characteristics and quality of a body of research can be determined.
- It is preferable to include all research in an audit, regardless of whether abstracts are available, as it provides an indication of the extent (i.e., amount) of research on a topic. However, it is also important to note that identifying relevant research without an abstract can be difficult if the *title* of the research does not indicate the *topic* of the research.

In conclusion, and perhaps most importantly, although a written report of a research audit provides aggregated information about research undertaken during a certain period of time, providing researchers and policy-makers with access to a searchable database of research identified through an audit is equally, if not more useful. The following concluding section of this report describes the resource that aims to provide this service, the Protecting Australia’s Children Research and Evaluation Register.

## 5 Protecting Australia’s Children Research and Evaluation Register

In 2005, Higgins et al. (2005) concluded their audit of research relating to child protection by calling for a database of research relating to child protection and child maltreatment that functions as a “living resource” rather than an “archival record” (p. 28). They argued that if such a database were maintained, “it would become a more accurate reflection of the scope of child protection research in Australia” (p. 28). They also highlighted the benefits of providing professionals working in policy and practice with greater accessibility to research, claiming that access to research “is the cornerstone of effective dissemination to inform policy and practice” (p. 28).

During the period that this audit was being conducted, the Australian Institute of Family Studies developed the infrastructure for a searchable online database of all the projects included in the audit ( $n = 1,359$ ). The database includes detailed information about each of the projects, including the names of chief investigators, aim/purpose of the research, findings and implications of the research, methodological information (e.g., data sample, data size) and the contact details of researchers.

The database has the capacity for the records of projects currently in the database, including information about new projects, to be updated over time, so it serves the function that Higgins et al. (2005) noted as being especially significant; that is, functioning as a “living resource” rather than an “archival record”.

There are three key benefits of the database:

- *providing researchers in the field with information about research that has already been undertaken and research that is currently underway*—this limits the potential for duplication of effort by researchers and enables them to identify gaps in the research using a relatively straightforward method;
- *providing policy-makers and practitioners with access to information about research to inform the planning and delivery of services*—one of the key barriers to utilising research in policy and practice is a lack of access to research, and providing access to the database fulfils this need; and
- *undertaking regular audits of research in a more effective, efficient manner*—the database allows researchers to provide information about their research at a time that is convenient to them (rather than inputting information via an audit form that is only available for a certain period of time) and provides those undertaking an audit with an easily accessible database of research, thereby reducing the need for comprehensive literature searches and audit forms.

In order to function as a “living resource”, it is critical that the database is regularly promoted to those organisations and individuals who are likely to be undertaking research relating to the protection of Australia’s children. A database that is widely used and easily accessible will provide the incentive for researchers to include their research, as it provides them with an opportunity to promote their own research within the field. The Protecting Australia’s Children Research and Evaluation Register has the potential to make a significant indirect contribution to improving outcomes for children and families in Australia.

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# Appendix A

## Literature search terms

Supporting outcome	Included topics	Search terms <sup>a</sup>
1. Children live in safe and supportive families and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child abuse and neglect education (including public awareness campaigns)</li> <li>▪ Community education programs about children, parenting, child development and children's needs</li> <li>▪ Children's participation in decisions regarding child protection, juvenile justice, family court and out-of-home care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community education and</li> <li>▪ Child development or</li> <li>▪ Child behaviour or</li> <li>▪ Child rearing or</li> <li>▪ Child welfare or</li> <li>▪ Parent role or</li> <li>▪ Parent responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Children and decision-making or participation</li> </ul>
2. Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prevention and early intervention (of child abuse and neglect) services/programs</li> <li>▪ Children at risk (of child abuse and neglect)</li> <li>▪ Service availability/service access/service improvements for vulnerable/at-risk families <sup>a</sup></li> <li>▪ Area-based disadvantage/intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family support services or</li> <li>▪ At risk children or</li> <li>▪ Early intervention and</li> <li>▪ Child welfare or (see search terms for supporting outcome 4)</li> <li>▪ Neighbourhoods and disadvantaged groups</li> </ul>
3. Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Risk factors for abuse and neglect <sup>b</sup></li> <li>▪ Domestic violence, parental alcohol and drug abuse, and parental mental health problems and parenting/children <sup>c</sup></li> <li>▪ Adult treatment services and "child focus"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Domestic violence and children or</li> <li>▪ Alcohol abuse or alcohol use and children or parent or</li> <li>▪ Mental health and children or parent</li> </ul>
4. Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child abuse and neglect (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, emotional abuse/neglect, physical neglect and exposure to family violence)</li> <li>▪ Child protection (e.g., service systems, assessment and intervention)</li> <li>▪ Out-of-home care (including foster care, kinship care, leaving care and reunification)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child abuse</li> <li>▪ Child emotional abuse</li> <li>▪ Child physical abuse</li> <li>▪ Child protection</li> <li>▪ Child sexual abuse</li> <li>▪ Substitute care</li> <li>▪ Foster care</li> <li>▪ Residential care</li> <li>▪ Kinship care</li> <li>▪ Leaving care</li> <li>▪ Reunification</li> <li>▪ Permanency planning</li> </ul>
5. Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to address Indigenous disadvantage (e.g., housing)</li> <li>▪ Community-wide strategies to address alcohol misuse and family violence</li> <li>▪ Community-led or community-identified solutions to protecting children</li> <li>▪ Indigenous children in OOHC maintaining connection to family, community and culture</li> <li>▪ Partnerships between government, service providers and Indigenous families/communities that relate to protecting children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Indigenous Australians and disadvantaged groups</li> <li>▪ Indigenous Australians and decision making</li> <li>▪ Indigenous Australians and community development</li> </ul>
6. Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child sexual abuse/assault</li> <li>▪ Sexual exploitation of children (e.g., online sexual exploitation)</li> <li>▪ Child sex abuse perpetrators</li> <li>▪ Children's sexually abusive behaviour</li> <li>▪ Sibling sexually abusive behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child sexual abuse</li> </ul>

Note: <sup>a</sup> These search terms are based on the subject headings used in Australian Family and Society Abstracts.

# Appendix B

## Audit form

### Protecting Australia's Children: Research Audit 1995–2010

Thank you for participating in the Protecting Australia's Children: Research Audit 1995–2010.

**Contact details will be collected for the purpose of clarifying any information you provide. You will be given the option of including your contact details in a publicly searchable database.**

If you are inputting information about multiple projects please complete one questionnaire for each individual project.

If you have any questions about the audit you can phone (03) 9214 7885 and ask to speak to the Protecting Australia's Children: Research Audit co-ordinator or contact the project team.

There are 38 questions in this survey.

---

### *Project details*

We would like to begin by asking you for some general background information about the project.

*Mandatory questions are indicated by a red asterisk \**

---

#### 1 What is the name of the project? \*

Please write your answer here:

---

#### 2 Which of the following topics does the project address? \*

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Building safe, supportive communities for children and/or families
- Support for vulnerable and at-risk families
- Prevention of child abuse and neglect (including primary, secondary and tertiary prevention)
- Child abuse and neglect (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, emotional
- abuse/neglect, physical neglect and witnessing family violence)
- Child protection services and/or systems and/or practice
- Other child protection issues
- Support for children who have been abused or neglected
- Out of home care (including leaving care)
- Other related category

---

### 3 Please describe this other related category

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was 'Other related category' at question '2 [TOPICS2]' (Which of the following topics does the project address?)

Please write your answer here:

---

### 4 What year did the project commence?

Please write your answer here:

---

### 5 Has the project been completed? \*

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

---

### 6 What year was the project completed?

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was 'Yes' at question '5 [COMPLETE]' (Has the project been completed?)

Please write your answer here:

---

### 7 Who is/are the chief investigators on the project?

First name	Surname	Affiliation (e.g., University of Melbourne, The Benevolent Society)	Position (e.g., Associate Professor, Senior Manager)
Investigator 1			
Investigator 2			
Investigator 3			
Investigator 4			

If there are more than 4 chief investigators please list the names of the investigators in alphabetical order and include the first 4 only.

---

## 8 What are the disciplinary areas of the chief investigators?

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Social work
- Social policy
- Psychology
- Education
- Sociology
- Law

Other:

---

## 9 What type of organisations are involved in conducting the project? \*

Please choose **all** that apply:

- University
- Government department
- Research Institute
- Non-government organisation/agency

Other:

---

## 10 Is the project being conducted as part of the requirements of a degree program? (e.g., Professional Doctorate/PhD, Masters or Honours research)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
  - No
- 

## 11 This project is being conducted for the requirements of a:

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was 'Yes' at question '10 [DEG]' (Is the project being conducted as part of the requirements of a degree program? (e.g., Professional Doctorate/PhD, Masters or Honours research))

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Professional Doctorate/PhD
- Masters degree
- Honours course
- Other

---

## *Research purpose and focus*

We would now like to ask you some questions about the purpose and focus of the project.

*Mandatory questions are indicated by a red asterisk \**

---

### 12 What is the aim or purpose of this project? (maximum 200 words) \*

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste this information from another document.

---

### 13 Is the project research only, evaluation only or both research and evaluation? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Research only
- Evaluation only
- Research and evaluation
- Don't know/unsure

Other:

Research is conducted with to the intent to generalize the findings from a sample to a larger population. Evaluation usually focuses upon collecting data for the purposes of determining the worth, merit or value of a specific program or client group activity.

---

### 14 Please indicate what type of program is being evaluated

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was 'Evaluation only' or 'Research and evaluation' at question '13 [TYPE]' (Is the project research only, evaluation only or both research and evaluation?)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Prevention program for children
- Tertiary intervention program for child victims
- Child-focused programs within adult-oriented services
- Family support program
- Parent education program
- Community education program
- Statutory child protection service
- Specialist/innovative Child Protection service program

Other:

---

15 What is the research question or hypothesis? (if relevant) (maximum 150 words)

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste this information from another document.

---

16 Does the project address the topic of child abuse or child neglect? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/unsure

---

17 What forms of child abuse or neglect are covered in the project?

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was 'Yes' at question '16 [CAN]' (Does the project address the topic of child abuse or child neglect?)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Sexual abuse
- Physical abuse
- Psychological abuse/emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Witnessing family violence
- All maltreatment types
- Other:

---

**18 Please describe the major findings from the project (if available) (maximum 250 words)**

Please write your answer here:

If the project has not reached the stage where findings can be identified please leave this question blank.

Findings from individual projects will not be included in the audit report (unless they have already been published in a publicly available report, journal article etc).

Feel free to cut and paste this information from another document about your project (e.g., project proposal, ethics application, journal article, report).

---

**19 Please describe any implications for policy and/or practice that emerge as a result of this project (if relevant) (maximum 250 words)**

Please write your answer here:

If the project has not reached the stage where implications can be identified please leave this question blank.

Implications for policy and/or practice will not be included in the audit report (unless they have already been published in a publicly available report, journal article etc).

Feel free to cut and paste this information from another document about your project (e.g., project proposal, ethics application, journal article, report).

---

**20 Will the project address issues relating to Indigenous Australians?**

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/unsure
- Not applicable

---

## Methodology

We would now like to ask you some questions about the project methodology.

*Mandatory questions are indicated by a red asterisk \**

---

### 21 From which of the following groups are you collecting data for this project? \*

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Parents
- Foster carers
- Kinship carers
- Children/Young people
- Professionals (e.g., child protection workers, social workers, family support workers, teachers)
- Not applicable
- Other:

---

### 22 What term best describes the parents who will constitute the data sample for the project?

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was at question '21 [SAMP1]' (From which of the following groups are you collecting data for this project?)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Parents from the general community
- Parents at risk of abusing or neglecting their children
- Parents whose children are in out-of-home care
- Other:

---

### 23 Which of the following groups do the professionals in the data sample come from?

**Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:**

\* Answer was at question '21 [SAMP1]' (From which of the following groups are you collecting data for this project?)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Child protection workers
- Welfare/family support workers/community development workers
- Health professionals
- Education professionals
- Legal professionals
- Other:

---

## 24 What is the size of the data sample?

Please write your answer here:

If you are uncertain what the size of the data sample will be please provide an estimate.

---

## 25 Will the data sample include:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Indigenous Australians only
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- Non-Indigenous Australians only
- Don't know/unsure
- Not applicable

The term 'Indigenous Australians' as it is used here incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

---

## Location

We would now like to ask you some questions about the location of the research.

*Mandatory questions are indicated by a red asterisk \**

---

### 26 What is the primary state/territory where the research is based? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- ACT
- New South Wales
- Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria
- Western Australia

This question concerns where the project is being conducted not where the data sample comes from.

---

### 27 Is the project being conducted across different regions in one state/territory? (e.g., two different suburbs, one metropolitan and one regional area)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

---

## *Funding*

We would now like to ask you some questions about funding for the project.

---

### 28 Please identify what type of organisation is funding the project

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Commonwealth Research Granting Agency (ARC, NH&MRC)
- State/Local Government
- University
- Philanthropic trust
- Self funded
- Not applicable
- Other:

---

### 29 What is the total amount of funding that will be provided to undertake the research project?

Please write your answer here:

Please provide the amount in whole dollars. Please provide the amount in Australian dollars. If no funding is being provided please enter '0'.

---

## *Publications*

We would now like to ask you some questions about publications, conferences and other resources produced as a result of this project.

---

### 30 Please list any journal articles that have presented the findings of this project

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste directly from a reference list.

If you are not cutting and pasting from a reference list we would greatly appreciate it if you could provide details of products in the APA style of referencing. See below for an example of the APA style of referencing for journal articles.

#### **Journal articles**

Marks, N. F., Lambert, J.D., & Choi, H. (2002). Transitions to caregiving, gender and psychological well-being: A prospective US national study. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(3), 657–667.

---

### 31 Please list any conference papers or conference proceedings where the findings from this project have been presented.

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste directly from a reference list.

If you are not cutting and pasting from a reference list we would greatly appreciate it if you could provide details of products in the APA style of referencing. See below for an example of the APA style of referencing for conference papers.

#### **Conference paper**

McDonald, P., & Kippen, R. (2000, March). *Building child-friendly communities in Australia*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Los Angeles, California.

---

**32 Please list any reports that have presented the findings of this project.**

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste directly from a reference list.

If you are not cutting and pasting from a reference list we would greatly appreciate it if you could provide details of products in the APA style of referencing. See below for an example of the APA style of referencing for reports.

**Report**

Jones, B., & Karol, S. (2004). *Children and homelessness: Evaluation of the CARE program* (Report No. 3). Canberra: The Australian Association of Caring Agencies.

---

**33 Please list any unpublished dissertations of theses that have been produced as a result of this project.**

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste directly from a reference list.

If you are not cutting and pasting from a reference list we would greatly appreciate it if you could provide details of products in the APA style of referencing. See below for an example of the APA style of referencing for an unpublished dissertation or thesis.

**Unpublished dissertation or thesis**

Smith, J. F. (2005). *A study of risk factors for child abuse and neglect*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW.

---

**34 Please list any books or book chapters that present the findings of this project.**

Please write your answer here:

Feel free to cut and paste directly from a reference list.

If you are not cutting and pasting from a reference list we would greatly appreciate it if you could provide details of products in the APA style of referencing. See below for an example of the APA style of referencing for books and book chapters.

Book

Heady, B., Warren, D., & Harding G. (2006). *Families, incomes and jobs: A statistical report of the HILDA survey*. Melbourne: Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

**Chapter in an edited book**

Bittman, M. (2004). Parenting and employment: What time use surveys show. In N. Folbre & M. Bittman (Eds.), *Family time: The social organisation of care* (pp. 69–89). London: Routledge.

---

**35 Please list any other products that have been produced as a result of this project.**

Please write your answer here:

---

## Contact Details

*Mandatory questions are indicated by a red asterisk \**

---

**36**

We may need to clarify some of the information you have provided in this questionnaire. Please provide an email address so we can contact you for this purpose. (The contact information you provide here will only be made available to the researchers working on the project.) \*

Contact for clarification

---

**37**

One of the outcomes of this audit will be the development of a publicly available database that will incorporate information about research and evaluation projects. Please provide public contact details in the text boxes below. \*

Public contact details

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**38 Please click SUBMIT to finish the survey**

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**Submit your survey.**

Thank you for completing this survey.