The Needs of Carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in Foster Care in Australia: A Systematic Literature Review. July 2018

Djala Kalinin, Macquarie University
Dr John Gilroy, The University of Sydney
Aunty Sue Pinckham, Macquarie University
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original inhabitants of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. The Research Team also acknowledges the great work of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are in out-of-home-care (OOHC).

This report was funded by the NSW Government’s Their Futures Matter. However, the views it contains are not necessarily those of the NSW Government.

We acknowledge and thank Elaine Tam, Academic Liaison Librarian, The University of Sydney, who actively provided guidance with the research of scientific literature.

FRONT COVER STORY

The authors asked an Aboriginal foster family of three Aboriginal children to work together on a drawing to explain what foster care means for their family. To them it means family, culture, love, and nature. The three traced hands are those of the children in care, who must remain anonymous.

BACK COVER STORY

The authors asked an Aboriginal foster child to explain what foster care means to them. Using chalk, the child drew what it meant to them, a safe, loving home with mum and dad.

CONTACT DETAILS

Aunty Sue Pinckham
Cultural Advisor
Walonga Muru
Macquarie University
Balaclava Road, North Ryde
NSW, 2109, Australia
T 61298508653
E sue.pinckham@mq.edu.au

Dr John Gilroy (PhD)
Senior Lecturer
Centre for Disability Research and Policy
The University of Sydney
PO Box 170 Lidcombe NSW 1825 Australia
T 61427238776
E john.gilroy@sydney.edu.au

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Introduction

Recent research into the pressures on the out-of-home care (OOHC) system concluded that there was a limited amount of research driven by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community itself, which indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are not being adequately captured. This means that the views of carers and departmental government officers on the key barriers to placement stability for foster carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not fully represented.

At the start of 2018, the NSW Government Their Futures Matter (TFM) approached Dr John Gilroy and Aunty Sue Pinckham to undertake a review of research publications on the needs of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are in OOHC. The purpose of this study is to support the funding of Aboriginal-controlled research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under government-administered foster care arrangements.

Background on OOHC

The NSW Government’s OOHC program provides foster care and accommodation placements for children and young people up to 18 years of age who are unable to live with their primary caregiver. Children are placed into OOHC arrangements when the child’s primary home environment is regarded by the government as unsafe (Baidawi, Mendes, & Saunders, 2017; Raman et al., 2017).

Australia has a federal model of government in which each of the eight government jurisdictions manages its own child welfare and protection system. One of the greatest successes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights movement was the adoption of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), which was agreed by all government jurisdictions. The aim of the ATSICPP is to eliminate the practices and policies of forced child removal in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Fundamentally, the goal of the ATSICPP is to preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s connection to kin, community and culture. In child protection legislation, policy and practice, the ATSICPP functions as a placement hierarchy “guide” for children and young people who need to be removed from their family environment. In general, child placement priorities are, in descending order (Arney, Iannos, Chong, McDougall, & Parkinson, 2015):

- within family and kinship networks;
- non-related carers in the child’s community; then
- carers in another Aboriginal community.

If kinship carers cannot be obtained, children and young people are placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers who are assessed as able to maintain the child’s connections to her or his cultural identity. The government provides multiple sources of support for carers of children and young people in OOHC, including financial assistance, respite care, and cultural awareness, to ensure that children are in a culturally safe and supportive environment.

Despite efforts to facilitate the provision of safe home environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, the rate at which they are being removed from home has resulted in their over-representation in the OOHC system. In 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprised 5.5% of all children and young people, yet this cohort accounted for 36.2% of all children and young people in OOHC. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS, 2017):
As of 30 June 2016, there were 16,846 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia—a placement rate of 56.6 per 1,000 children. In contrast, the rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was 5.8 per 1,000.

The increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering the OOHC system has led to significant pressure on the government to ensure the availability of resources for carer support, recruitment and retention (Secretariat of the National Aboriginal Islander Child Care, 2005). Carers are reporting significant stress from the lack of resources to enable carers to provide adequate care for children and young people. Carers are wanting additional support for cost of living, respite, before and after school care, and emotional and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. As a result many children and young people are being placed into inappropriate OOHC arrangements.

Many factors are responsible for the increase in numbers of children and young people in care. These include:

- Past policies (the stolen generation). All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have been impacted by the past government practice of forcibly removing children from their parents, a practice based on the Eurocentric principle of forced assimilation. Estimates of the number of children removed from their families range into the tens of thousands, with many small community surveys reporting that half of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population had been removed from their parents (Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997). Essentially, this was an attempted act of genocide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Many removed children did not learn the requisite parenting skills to raise their own children, resulting in transgenerational child removal and trauma.

- Intergenerational poverty and disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are reported to be the most disadvantaged cultural group in Australia. The experience of poverty and disadvantage is transgenerational, which means that children are born into poverty (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2015; Victorian Ombudsman, 2017).

- Distrust of early intervention services, leading to parent burnout. The history of European colonisation and policies of forced child removal created a legacy of distrust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and public and community service agencies. Research shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents often engage with children and family services in times of family crisis or breakdown, which often involves child protection agencies (Australian Institute of Family Studies, Chapin Hall Center for Children University of Chicago, & New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services, 2015; Kiraly, James, & Humphreys, 2015; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2015).

- Lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-managed family and youth services. A substantial body of research demonstrates the accumulative benefits of community-controlled organisations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often opt to access Aboriginal health and community workers or organisations. The lack of government investment into community control has contributed to the increasing rate of child removal (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2015).

- Child removal is having a significant impact on the acculturation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into traditional culture and practices. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have reported to governments and researchers that many children who are placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are not being appropriately incorporated into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and cultural life. In effect, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and knowledge are not being handed down to the next generation (Kiraly et al., 2015).
Project Methodology

The research team and representatives of TFM worked together on the research aims, scope and objective. The team defined the research question as:

What supports/resources do relative/kinship and foster carers need to improve placement stability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care?

The team completed a systematic review of national scientific and grey literature to identify evidence on OOHC for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander children. The team was of the view that a standard ‘desktop literature review’ would not identify the types of research being undertaken on the needs of OOHC carers. Standard desktop literature reviews are often biased towards major studies. Reflecting the concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers (Gilroy, Colmar, Donnelly, & Parmenter, 2013; Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003), the team felt that producing such a review would regurgitate the views of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars have argued that simply reporting on research findings produced by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers reinforces the subjugation and oppression of the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Gilroy, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2004, 2014).

Accordingly, the team developed a decolonisation methodological framework for this project. Decolonisation (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) centres on privileging the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by analysing and dismantling the power imbalances that exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in how research is undertaken to inform government and non-government agencies' policy, practice, and praxis. Reflecting the scholarly standpoints of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, such as Rigney (1999) Martin & Mirraboopa (2003), Gilroy and Donelly (2016), research about vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs a research framework designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The research team for this project comprised three Aboriginal researchers. The research decolonisation framework centres on addressing the following questions: ‘What is being said about us?’, ‘Who is speaking?’, ‘How did the researchers include Aboriginal voices?’, and ‘Where are the research findings being published?’

Data Collection

A systematic search of relevant research literature published between 2000 and 2017 was undertaken. Cashmere and Ainsworth define research as “the systematic gathering of information involving data collection and analysis, using either original data or administrative data sets” (cited in Bromfield & Osborn, 2007, p. 3). Systematic reviews “aim to identify all research addressing a specific question so that they give a balanced and unbiased summary of the literature” (Nightingale, 2009, p. 381). Reflecting on the research objective, the team created a ‘decolonisation model’ of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method. PRISMA is an evidence-based approach for systematic reviews and meta-analyses of research reported in scientific publications and grey literature (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The Prisma Group, 2009; Nightingale, 2009). The PRISMA model has its own guidelines on research articles that are included for analysis, known as the PRISMA Statement (Moher at al., 2009; Nightingale, 2009). Essentially, all research publications must include an abstract/introduction, methodology, results/findings, and discussion/conclusion sections.

A search string for searching for publicly available research publications was created during a Yarn Up consisting of the researchers, a university librarian, and a representative of TFM. Key words were Aboriginal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Torres Strait Islander, children, foster care, out of home care. For example, one search string comprised the following terms: aborigin* or Torres Strait Islander or indigen* or first nation* and foster or care*
or guardian or child* or young people or youth or community services. The librarian helped the research team
to design the search string. TFM also provided a list of funded research projects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people in OOHC to ascertain if the reports were publicly available.

Two types of published literature were searched and analysed: scientific and grey literature. Grey literature was
included as many not-for-profit organisations and private consultancy firms have produced research publications
on OOHC that may not have been published in scientific journals or books.

The project adopted the Centre for Disability Research and Policy’s (2014) definition of ‘scientific’ and ‘grey’
literature, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria for scientific and grey literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCLUDED</th>
<th>EXCLUDED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE</td>
<td>An opinion piece, viewpoint, perspective or invited comment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Published in a peer reviewed journal.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents the results of an investigation and/or secondary analysis</td>
<td>Research that is primarily medical, surgical, clinical or pharmacological.</td>
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<tr>
<td>of existing data reporting the aim of investigation, method, findings</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and conclusions.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>GREY LITERATURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available on a website, by request, as an organisational document</td>
<td>Opinion piece, viewpoint, guides and resources for clients, carers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>available from out-of-home-care related networks, government</td>
<td>perspectives or invited comment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>documents, theses and research that is published either by website.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports the results of investigating a particular topic/ topics</td>
<td>Research which is primarily medical, surgical, clinical or pharmacological.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>using data either from original sources or as secondary analysis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>of existing data. Such documents need to include the aim of the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>investigation, the method used, the findings and conclusions and/or</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>recommendation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A descriptive article of one case study. Not accessible on a public</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>website in a reasonable period of time using the above described search</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>strategy. Media presentations and presentations on research.</td>
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</table>

In consultation with the librarian, the following databases that publish scientific research on children in OOHC
were searched:

- Ovid Medline: leading bibliographic source for biomedical scholarly literature and research
- Cinahl: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature
- Scopus: the largest database of peer-reviewed scientific journals, books and conference
  proceedings in the fields of science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and arts
  and humanities
- Informit: over 100 databases covering a wide range of subjects including health, engineering,
  business, education, law, humanities and social sciences.
- Embase: multipurpose biomedical research database.

Google Scholar, the largest publicly accessible research database for scientific and grey literature, was then
searched to ensure an exhaustive coverage of research publications.

An initial search was completed in March 2018, and an updated search was undertaken in April 2018. During the
first phase it was recognised that articles published in the Australian Medical Journal had been identified through
the Google Scholar search but were not identified in our scientific literature search. With the assistance of the
librarian, the search string was computed differently for three databases – Scopus, Informit and Embase – for the
second search. The research data collection underwent a verification process by each member of the research
team and a TFM representative.
Results

A total of 888 publication abstracts were identified through the databases, of which 436 were duplicates and were therefore excluded (Figure 1). Of the remaining 452 abstracts, 11 could not be included as the whole document could not be downloaded, and 390 publications did not meet the specific criteria set for this study.

![Diagram of research and selection process of articles in systematic review based on PRISMA statement]

Figure 1: Research and selection process of articles in systematic review based on PRISMA statement

A total of fifty-one (N=51) research papers were downloaded and underwent text analysis: a total of fourteen (N=14) scientific publications and thirty-seven (N=37) grey publications were downloaded for text analysis as per our classifications. The text analysis identified a total of six (n=6) scientific publications and twenty-two (N=22) grey literature publications that fit our definition of research literature and fit the scope of this study. These are displayed in Tables 2 and 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Author and Date</th>
<th>State/ Territory/ National Focus</th>
<th>Aim of Study</th>
<th>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Governance</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Analytical Framework</th>
<th>Number of Participants or Data Sources</th>
<th>Key Findings Outlined in the Research Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins &amp; Richardson, 2006</td>
<td>Identify the challenges faced and programs carers and young people like involving OOHC.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not described.</td>
<td>Focus groups.</td>
<td>Thematic.</td>
<td>27 carers (9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 18 non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in OOHC.</td>
<td>Young people in care want good carers, connection to their family, and value opportunities to participate in activities that connect them to culture. Carers reported that they need more financial, practical, and emotional support to meet the needs of children in care. Also, better relationships with agency workers and adequate preparation for their role as carer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elarde &amp; Tilbury, 2007</td>
<td>QLD. Engage the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and carers of the OOHC system in QLD.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In-depth and semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and agency representative.</td>
<td>Thematic.</td>
<td>26 interviews (20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers).</td>
<td>Carers want financial support for home goods and services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boetto, 2010</td>
<td>National. Results of a literature review about kinship care with attention to policies and practice.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Review of literature.</td>
<td>Thematic.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>The OOHC system is unstructured. Kinship carers are often financially disadvantaged and unhealthy. There is a need for more research to give carers a voice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiraly, James &amp; Humphreys, 2015</td>
<td>VIC. Explore the nature of family contact in kinship care.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Questionnaire and focus groups.</td>
<td>Coding of focus group data and statistical analysis.</td>
<td>49 interviewed (15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and 39 non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers). 430 completed a survey (10% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers).</td>
<td>Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers need support for children to be engaged in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. There are many areas carers need more support, such as financial and housing. Need better carer assessment processes. Kinship carers are generally poorer, ageing people.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Analytical Framework</td>
<td>Number of Participants or Data Sources</td>
<td>Key Findings Outlined in the Research Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baidwai, Mendes &amp; Saunders, 2017.</td>
<td>VIC.</td>
<td>Investigate the impacts, barriers, benefits and limitations of cultural support planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in OOHC.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Focus-groups.</td>
<td>Content analysis.</td>
<td>32 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</td>
<td>Found six main themes: the complexity of identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status; relationships between services; the value of plans; barriers to completing plans; move beyond plans; cultural connections post-care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raman, Ruston, Irwin, Tran, Hotton &amp; Thorne, 2017.</td>
<td>NSW.</td>
<td>Identify ways to improve the developmental needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in care.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Use medical clinical data and used standardised developmental assessment tools.</td>
<td>Triangulation of the qualitative and scoring from assessments.</td>
<td>26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and 26 carers.</td>
<td>Children develop in stable care environment. Access to services improves child wellbeing. There is a need for research on the factors that make care environments stable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Grey Literature Research Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Author and Date</th>
<th>State/Territory/National Focus</th>
<th>Aim of Study</th>
<th>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</th>
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<tr>
<td>McHugh, Mc Nab, Smyth, Chalmers, Siminski &amp; Saunders, 2004.</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>To develop a demographic profile of current carers and their locations in NSW</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mixed methods - literature review, carer survey, interviews with key stakeholder and focus groups with carers and workers.</td>
<td>Critical analysis, identifying major themes</td>
<td>Random sample of 1000 of all 3000 Departmental foster carers in NSW 9 focus groups with carers (2 non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 1 DoCS, OOHC and fostering staff groups).</td>
<td>Urgent need for carers in all areas of fostering, improve care support and provide respite care to prevent care burnout. Improve recruitment of new carers to target professional groups who could more effectively care for children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromfield, Higgins, Osborn, Panozzo &amp; Richardson, 2005.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>To provide an in-depth review of all available publications emerging from the audit; highlighting what research the community has learned in relation to policy and practice, focusing research design and how these can inform future strategies</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Research publication review.</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>67 publications.</td>
<td>Family networks should remain connected when children are in OOHC. Placements need to be holistic and inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Further research into alternate placement options and attracting new carers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author and Date</td>
<td>State/ Territory/ National Focus</td>
<td>Aim of Study</td>
<td>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richardson, Bromfield &amp; Higgins, 2005.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Examine the recruitment, retention, training, assessment and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people care from children removed from their families.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>Literature included not specified; 134 references.</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers experience attitudinal and structural barriers limiting their willingness to care for children in OOHC. There is a need to investigate how services recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and how these services can encompass the motivations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins, Bromfield &amp; Richardson, 2005.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Identify carers', service providers' and young peoples' views on the challenges and promising practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander OOHC.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Consultations/Focus groups</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>80 individual organisational representatives, 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, 18 non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, 16 young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.</td>
<td>Need to improve accessibility to cultural activities, family and community. There is an insufficient number of carers and most carers are from low socio-economic areas facing material disadvantage.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, 2005.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Present SNAICC approach to achieving stable and culturally strong out of home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Series of interviews with the SNAICC Executive.</td>
<td>Interview analysis, identifying themes and elements of stable and culturally strong OOHC</td>
<td>Child and welfare representatives on the SNAICC Executive.</td>
<td>To provide supportive and culturally strong OOHC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; need to improve control of services, properly implement placement principles, develop national standards, maintain and build family connection and healing support services for families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromfield and Osborn, 2007.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Review of research literature on OOHC in Australia between 1995-2006 to ascertain the quality of the research/evidence base.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Not Mentioned.</td>
<td>Systematic Literature Review</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis.</td>
<td>80 publications were identified.</td>
<td>There is a high need for research to give OOHC providers, caregivers, and children a voice in policy. Existing assessment techniques and requirements are not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author and Date</td>
<td>State/ Territory/ National Focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bromfield, Higgins, Higgins &amp; Richardson 2007a.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Identify barriers to recruiting carers, and the strategies that worked well.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Interview(s) and focus groups.</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Barriers influencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become a carer are: influence of past government welfare policies, socio-economic disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, increasing number of children with complex needs and high-risk behaviours – cultural commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromfield, Higgins, Higgins &amp; Richardson, 2007b.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Identify the successful strategies and barriers to recruiting carers to address the shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Interview(s) and focus groups.</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>There are not enough carers for the number of children in OOHC. Carers are retiring, overloaded, burning out and there are not enough emergency respite placements available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromfield, Higgins, Richardson &amp; Higgins, 2007.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Discuss the shortcomings of current assessment procedures when used to assess potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Interview(s) and focus groups.</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Limitations of current procedures are: based on Anglo-European parenting values and living standards; exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with a criminal history; do not align with the communication style of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author and Date</td>
<td>State/Territory</td>
<td>Aim of Study</td>
<td>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Governance</td>
<td>Data Collection Method</td>
<td>Analytical Framework</td>
<td>Number of Participants or Data Sources</td>
<td>Key FindingsOutlined in the Research Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richardson, Bromfield, Higgins &amp; Higgins, 2007</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Identify and discuss what training would assist carers in providing safe, nurturing care and continuity of cultural needs for children in care.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Interview(s) and focus groups</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Areas of improvement: train carers to understand how territory and state departments work, timely and culturally relevant training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins &amp; Richardson2007</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Identify and discuss the support needs of carers.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>Interview and focus groups</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Carers do not feel adequately supported both financially and emotionally. If they are able to support the child, they are caring for they will feel supported themselves. Carers want to strengthen community and departmental support networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins, Higgins, Bromfield &amp; Richardson2007</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Identify and discuss the needs of carers who care for children with complex needs.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>Interview and focus groups</td>
<td>Critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Carers need access to additional support services for children with complex needs including: access to specialists, cultural monitoring, school-based support and family access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins &amp; Butler, 2007a</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Identify and discuss what participants thought were barriers to recruiting, assessing, training and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Literature review, interviews and focus groups</td>
<td>Thematic analysis, critical analysis of focus groups and interviews to identify common, overarching themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Highlighted the importance of quality training programs, appropriately supporting and training carers by the organisation, culturally appropriate placements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author and Date</td>
<td>State/Territory/ National Focus</td>
<td>Aim of Study</td>
<td>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higgins &amp; Butler, 2007b</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Summary of a two-phase project exploring barriers to recruiting, assessing, training and supporting carers and young people.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Two-phase project (phase one – literature review, phase two – interview and focus groups with organisations.)</td>
<td>Identify common themes and concerns.</td>
<td>Phase two included 11 programs and services around Australia.</td>
<td>Underlying causes for over-representation: legacy of past policies; intergenerational effects of forced removal; poverty; cultural differences in child-rearing practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins &amp; Butler, 2007c</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Introduction and background to a project detailing comprehensive support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and young people.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Not applicable.</td>
<td>Critical analysis of themes.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Quality training programs should include broader care support — support and training cares facilitates the recruitment of new carers — appropriately train and provide adequate resources to carers — ensure children's cultural needs are being met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW Ombudsman, 2008</td>
<td>NSW.</td>
<td>Examines the issues affecting carers of Aboriginal children, the adequacy of services and support in place to provide quality care.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Interviews and surveys.</td>
<td>Critical analysis to identify common themes.</td>
<td>100 carers (68 Aboriginal; 32 non-Aboriginal).</td>
<td>Better support for carers by improving relationship with departments and caseworkers, strengthening and monitoring carer support initiatives, developing, implementing and monitoring appropriate and consistent cultural support planning, ensuring ongoing initiatives to improve educational supports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author and Date</td>
<td>State/ Territory/ National Focus</td>
<td>Aim of Study</td>
<td>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Libesman, 2011.</td>
<td>NSW, WA, SA.</td>
<td>Identifying cultural care practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Literature review; review of state and territory legislation and policy; semi-structured questionnaire presented to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander out-of-home care agencies</td>
<td>Critical analysis of legislation and policy and interview analysis to identify themes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Literature Review (no. articles not specified).</td>
<td>Most significant immediate barrier is the incomplete implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; contributing to inadequate support and residential care, lack of resources and suggest cultural education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McHugh &amp; Valentine, 2011.</td>
<td>National.</td>
<td>Describe the support and services available to formal and informal out-of-home carers.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Describes current services and qualitative evidence from carers.</td>
<td>Critical analysis</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Barriers to fostering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: material disadvantage, past government policies and practices, OOHC mismatch. No coherence with financial support between jurisdictions and age-related payment systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McHugh, 2013.</td>
<td>NSW.</td>
<td>Identify and explore the various aspects and risks to stability in foster and kinship placements.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Carer interview and survey</td>
<td>Critical analysis</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>In-depth interviews with 33 carers (20 kinship, 13 foster carers); online survey (37 managerial/non-managerial agency staff).</td>
<td>Risks identified: Carer availability and/or willingness to be a carer, children with complex needs contributes to placement instability, financial disadvantage, kinship carers appeared unprepared for the impact of family relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author and Date</td>
<td>State/Territory</td>
<td>National Focus</td>
<td>Aim of Study</td>
<td>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Governance</td>
<td>Data Collection Method</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2015</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Examines why so many children and young people, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, are entering and remaining in OOHC</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Submissions from individuals and organisations</td>
<td>Critical analysis</td>
<td>108 organisations and individuals</td>
<td>Barrier to appropriate cultural support is a lack of cultural competence. Some caseworkers do not understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural dynamics. OOHC challenges include: social disadvantage, family violence, drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Institute of Family Studies et al, 2015</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Examine the developmental wellbeing of children and young people in out-of-home care</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Longitudinal study following subset of the study population</td>
<td>Critical Analysis</td>
<td>4,126 children included in the study population. Wave 1 interview was completed for 1,285 of the 1,789 children whose caregivers agreed to participate</td>
<td>Carers need respite care, organisational support, more face-to-face support and contact between carer and caseworker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victorian Ombudsman, 2017</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Examine if the department considers the child's best interests, processes occur in a timely manner avoiding departmental delays and accurate information is provided</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Submissions, interviews, focus groups and policy review</td>
<td>Critical analysis</td>
<td>54 submissions, 3 focus groups, 13 funded service providers, 48 complaints and 27 voluntary interviews</td>
<td>Improve and annually review financial support for carers, provide greater equity between foster and kinship carers, address departmental delays.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The needs of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in foster care in Australia: A systematic literature review. July 2018

The identified publications reported on projects that either had a national scope or a focus on the Eastern states of Australia. As such, the views of South Australia and the Northern Territory have not been adequately captured in research over the period explored in this review.

There were several differences between the scientific and grey research publications identified in this study. Many of the latter either did not have, or did not mention, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance mechanism in place for the study. In addition, one scientific report and 19 grey literature reports did not disclose the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. As shown in Table 4, the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants reported represented a small proportion of all participant categories; with five of the six scientific research papers and four of the twenty-two grey research papers specifying participants’ indigeneity. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants were carers and children, which was also the case for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Many publications, however, did not report the indigeneity of the study participants. This suggests that researchers may have controlled most of the research and/or may not have adequately involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the data collection, in effect silencing their voices on the OOHc support needs of children.

Table 4: Accumulated Participant Numbers According to Indigeneity, Organisation and Type of Carer for Scientific and Grey Research Publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation representatives</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants</th>
<th>Children (Indigeneity not specified)</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants</th>
<th>Kinship carers (Indigeneity not specified)</th>
<th>Carers (Indigeneity not specified)</th>
<th>Foster carers (Indigeneity not specified)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Research</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey Research</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>1,285</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes Identified in the Scientific and Grey Research Publications

The reported findings indicated that the risk of OOHC placement instability revolves around carer support, recruitment, and availability and retention of carers. Analysis of the publications identified three main themes: the support needs of carers; availability, recruitment and retention of carers; and implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle.

**THEME ONE: SUPPORT NEEDS OF CARERS**

Carers were found to need support across multiple areas, including financial assistance, respite care, carer and department relationships, and cultural competence. It was suggested that addressing these key areas would equip carers to provide a culturally safe and stable placement (Higgins, Bromfield, Higgins, & Richardson, 2007; Higgins & Butler, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Higgins, Higgins, Bromfield, & Richardson, 2005; Richardson et al., 2007).

**SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

There was consensus in the research that carers require sufficient financial support to care for children in OOHC (Higgins et al., 2007; Victorian Ombudsmans, 2017). Levels of financial support over the study period were described as not meeting the cost of living, in effect placing pressure on carers to support children and young people in their care. The research indicated that the cost of raising children in OOHC is 50% greater than the cost of raising a child who has not been involved in such services (Bromfield et al., 2005). The higher costs are attributable to the foster child’s material and social disadvantage (Higgins et al., 2007).

**ADDITIONAL QUALITY RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS**

Adequate and flexible respite care arrangements have been linked to the improved recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. The publications identified that, in addition to respite care, carers emphasised the importance of childcare and outside school hours care (OSHC) (E.g. school vocational care, before and after school care) to enable them to engage in the paid workforce (Australian Institute of Family Studies et al., 2015; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2015).

**IMPROVED COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CARERS AND CHILD PROTECTION DEPARTMENTS**

The literature reported that unsupportive interactions between OOHC carers, OOHC caseworkers, and government departments placed substantial stress on carers and children and young people in care (Higgins et al., 2007). Carers had limited understanding of the operations of government departments (Richardson et al., 2007). Higgins and Butler (2007) concluded that improved relationships between carers and agency departments enabled carers to confidently discuss and address issues regarding the children and young people in their care. Improving the relationship between carers and government departments can ensure adequate and timely OOHC arrangements (NSW Ombudsman, 2008; Victorian Ombudsman, 2017).

**CULTURALLY SUPPORTIVE AND RESPONSIVE CARE ARRANGEMENTS**

The literature reported that cultural integrity, community involvement and well implemented cultural support plans contribute to a positive, stable placement arrangements. Cultural support plans include family and community access, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks, education programs, such as cultural competence training and carer support groups, which train carers in the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children ensuring the belonging of children to their culture. Such plans have enabled children to be socialised into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, thus building a strong cultural identity and...
connection across their lifespan whilst strengthening and stabilising placements (NSW Ombudsman, 2008). Cultural support plans also enhance carers’ ability, confidence, and understanding to foster and raise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Higgins et al., 2007; Higgins et al., 2005; Higgins & Butler, 2007c; Richardson et al., 2005; Richardson et al., 2007; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2015).

The studies found, however, that the implementation of cultural support plans was generally neglected by government agencies. Further, it was reported that many formal cultural competence programs had not been adapted to the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Richardson et al., 2007).

**More support for children and young people with ‘complex needs’**

The literature reported that the increasing number of children and young people with complex support needs has contributed to the high rates of placement instability, since they often require more supports and services. Bromfield et al. (2007) found that carers encounter significant inconsistencies and gaps when accessing basic and specialist services for children and young people with high support needs. The specialist services included mental health, education, counselling, language and speech, and general medical and health. Many researchers observed that the population of carers generally had poor knowledge and awareness of what services were available to support the OOHC placement (Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2015).

**Opportunities for carers to engage in the workforce**

Carer employment was considered a risk factor for placement instability. Some carers reported having to make arrangements for childcare or reduce their working hours to cater for the child’s needs, a situation that was compounded by the financial disadvantages many of them faced (McHugh, 2013; McHugh & Valentine, 2011; Richardson et al., 2005).

**Better preparedness for kinship carers**

Kinship carers were identified as being less prepared for the impact of caring for a family member. This contributed to placement instability as family networks and relationships become strained. Further, many kinship carers are older people who are likely to have more serious health concerns, which were reportedly exacerbated by their caring role (Higgins & Butler, 2007a; Libesman, 2011; McHugh et al., 2004).
The literature reported multiple interrelated issues around the availability, recruitment, and retention of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Higgins, Bromfield and Richardson (2005) suggested the greatest overarching concern for government departments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster care agencies, and carers was the insufficient number of carers. Various studies (Bromfield et al., 2005; Bromfield & Osborn, 2007; Higgins et al., 2005; McHugh, 2013; NSW Ombudsman, 2008; Richardson et al., 2005) concluded that recruitment and retention policies and practices do not adequately reflect the cultural motivations of carers to foster and support children and young people. The research identified the main factors contributing to poor rates of carer availability, recruitment, and retention as follows:

- Mismatch between the formal out-of-home care system and traditional child rearing practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Insufficient carers to meet the increasing number of OOHC placements.
- The struggle faced by the OOHC system to provide adequate carer assessment and training, which contributes to carer burnout and dissatisfaction.
- Material disadvantage experienced by a disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such disadvantage is amplified in remote areas where there is limited availability of fresh food, transport, and services.
- Many child protection authorities are reportedly failing to identify children's and young people's Indigeneity correctly during the placement screening process. In effect, the OOHC cultural support plans do not capture the cultural and family needs of these children and carers.
- The existence of numerous barriers to the OOHC application and assessment process among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities. Many potential kinship carers who are illiterate opt out of the assessment process for fear of shame and embarrassment.
- All carers are required to pass a police check, a process that deters many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have a criminal record for minor offences from considering becoming a carer.
- There are inadequate Aboriginal services to support carers and children throughout the placement.
- Overall lack of communication pathways for carers.
- There are insufficient cultural materials for carers to access to improve their cultural awareness.
- Not enough cultural interaction for carers and children and/or young people.

The literature made the following recommendations to improve carer availability, recruitment, and retention:

- Improve accessibility to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and cultural activities for children and young people in care. Enabling carers to experience a positive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures ensures OOHC placement stability.
- Improve OOHC assessment and induction requirements to address the concerns of new carers.
- Revise the recruitment and assessment policies to ensure new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carer applicants are fairly treated.
- Revise OOHC models to accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional child rearing practices – especially regarding shared care of children.
- Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers to talk about their own grief associated with the stolen generation.
- Produce resources that assist new and current carers to avoid cultural misunderstanding of the recruitment and assessment processes and monitoring.
- Supporting and ensuring carers are comfortable to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
Theme 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

The ATSCIPP is pivotal in ensuring that government OOHC programs do not repeat the policy mistakes that contributed to the stolen generation (Secretariat of the National Aboriginal Islander Child Care, 2005). Two studies reported on the need to revise, update and effectively implement the ATSCIPP (Libesman, 2011; Secretariat of the National Aboriginal Islander Child Care, 2005). Despite the ATSCIPP’s focus on establishing a culturally responsible OOHC system, the literature reported poor compliance and implementation of the principle across all states and territories (Libesman, 2011; Secretariat of the National Aboriginal Islander Child Care, 2005). Inadequate implementation was specifically noted in relation to the following issues (Bromfield & Osborn, 2007):

- Departments not following its own path and procedures.
- Existing assessment techniques and requirements were not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and potentially prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from becoming carers.
- There is a lack of inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth parents to maintain contact with their children in OOHC.
- Siblings are being separated despite emphasis on the importance of keeping them together.
- Placement options with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or kinship carers were not adequately investigated prior to placement, resulting in children being placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

The literature made the following recommendations to ensure OOHC placements conform to the ATSCIPP:

- Offer agencies additional resources to effectively recruit, assess, and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.
- Provide resources and services to agencies to assist families to address concerns that lead to the use of out-of-home care services.
- Support carers financially and prioritise housing assistance to keep siblings together.
- Provide equitable funding opportunities for kinship carers. Financial support should be determined by the needs of the child and the carer, not the type of carer.
- Work to change the perception around caring for children in OOHC so that it is perceived as highly valued and skilled and all carers are adequately supported.
- Carers should be eligible and supported with transport costs of children.

It is argued that improving the implementation of the ATSCIPP will create a more stable, culturally appropriate and secure placement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC (Secretariat of the National Aboriginal Islander Child Care, 2005). Adequate training for carers and positive perception of carers towards their role in housing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will enhance the stability and quality of OOHC in the child’s best interests.
Discussion

This systematic review of literature published between 2000 and 2017 found limited research on the needs of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who are in OOHC. A total of 28 publications (22 grey literature reports and six scientific papers) that met the research specifications were identified. A large proportion of these publications were produced between 2005 and 2007 by the same research team in the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The study also revealed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices were not properly captured in research on the needs of OOHC carers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not involved in most of the research included in the study. This is very concerning given the high rates of placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC arrangements.

Content analysis of the literature identified three main themes: the support needs of carers; availability, recruitment and retention of carers; and implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle. The risk of placement instability was found to be an ongoing challenge for OOHC stakeholders and carers. The risks are interrelated and include increasing numbers of children with complex needs, cost of living pressures pushing families to become or remain dual-income households, and inadequate training and preparation for families to become carers of OOHC children.

The research publications indicate that the current OOHC system is under pressure to recruit adequate numbers of qualified carers into the already system. Cost of living pressures, changes in lifestyle, and poor relationships between carers and governments have contributed to OOHC placement instability.

Government and non-government agencies are struggling to retain existing carers. Carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have constantly and consistently reported that they are in urgent need of additional support to fulfil their caring duties. These supports include financial assistance, respite and childcare, and better engagement with government child protection agency staff. Inadequate levels of support are contributing to carer burnout and placement instability.

The literature indicated that many of these challenges are linked to poor implementation, compliance, and monitoring of the ATSICPP. There is a need for further investigation into this situation.
Conclusion

This systematic literature review concludes that there is an urgent need to invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled research on the needs of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are in the OOHC system. There is no question that the current OOHC system is under pressure to maintain healthy, stable placements for carers and children and young people.

These pressures are further disadvantaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who were born into disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and poverty. Such research should include the voices of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, adults, older people and Elders, and carers.

The research publications indicate that the current OOHC system is under pressure to recruit adequate numbers of qualified carers into the system. Cost of living pressures, changes in lifestyle, and relationships between carers and governments have contributed to OOHC placement instability.

Government and non-government agencies are struggling to retain existing carers. Carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have constantly and consistently reported that they are in urgent need of additional support to fulfil their caring duties. These supports include financial assistance, respite and childcare, and better engagement with government child protection agency staff. Inadequate levels of support are contributing to carer burnout and placement instability.

The literature indicated that many of these challenges are linked to poor implementation, compliance, and monitoring of the ATSICPP. There is a need for further investigation into this situation.

There is a positive relationship between stable foster care placements with the healthy development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (Raman et al., 2017). This study has shown that research has demonstrated that government policies and investment are not providing enough support for current foster carers to provide stable placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Many of the publications included in this study have recommended reforms of the OOHC system to improve the stability of foster care placements. Such recommendation include increasing targeted investment in support and services that enable carers to cover the increasing cost of living expenses, outside school hours care, carer respite, social and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
References


The Needs of Carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in Foster Care in Australia: A Systematic Literature Review. July 2018