

NSW voluntary out-of-home care

Information for families

What is voluntary out-of-home care?

Voluntary out-of-home care (VOOHC) is where a child or young person's family consents to an agency providing or arranging overnight care for their child away from their usual home.

VOOHC is not a specific service. Rather, it is a type of arrangement which may include:

- Overnight or short-term accommodation in a group home or respite environment
- Overnight stay with another family in a 'host family' arrangement
- Longer term residential care
- Camps that focus on respite care or behaviour support
- Bail Assistance Line Program

VOOHC may be provided as a one-off emergency placement or may be accessed on a regular or long-term basis. These arrangements can be funded in several ways including direct payment by families, the bail assistance program or individual funding through the NDIS.



The Children's Guardian's role in VOOHC

VOOHC agencies should adhere to the Statutory Procedures: Voluntary out-of-home care in NSW and Child Safe Standards and must actively take steps to ensure that children and young people in their care are safe. Since 2011, the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) has regulated VOOHC agencies to ensure their practices are child safe and facilitates continuous improvement in service coordination, planning and delivery.

The Child Safe Standards guide VOOHC agencies to be child safe:

1. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
2. Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. Families and communities are informed and involved
4. Equity is upheld, and diverse needs are taken in to account
5. People working with children are suitable and supported
6. Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused
7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

What must VOOHC agencies do?

VOOHC agencies are required to:

- Register with the Office of the Children's Guardian to provide or arrange VOOHC in NSW
- Follow the Child Safe Standards
- Meet Minimum intake, assessment, interagency and case planning requirements
- Involve children and young people and their families in care planning and decision-making
- Make children and young people and families aware of how they can make and resolve complaints about VOOHC
- Provide culturally appropriate services
- Enter basic information about children and young people and their care onto the VOOHC Register
- Arrange for children and young people in VOOHC for more than 90 days in any 12-month period to have their care supervised
- Ensure children and young people in VOOHC for more than 180 days in any 12-month period have an approved case plan which is renewed at least once a year

A list of all agencies registered with the OCG to provide and/or arrange VOOHC can be found on the OCG website: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au

Please note this list is not a list of recommended agencies. Families are encouraged to research the agencies before engaging them.



The VOOHC Register

The OCG monitors the number of times a child or young person accesses VOOHC to identify where additional supports may be required.

The VOOHC Register is a secure online database that records information about a child or young person accessing VOOHC. The VOOHC Register is updated by agencies that provide direct care and holds the following information:

- Full name and any previous name
- Date and place of birth
- Gender
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status
- Disability
- Name of the VOOHC agency
- Length of time spent in VOOHC
- Dates of any case plan or reviews

A child or young person has a right to access and correct any information held about them by a VOOHC agency or the VOOHC Register.


Information Exchange

VOOHC agencies are 'prescribed bodies' under Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998. This means agencies can exchange information if it assists other 'prescribed bodies' to:

- Make a decision or undertake an assessment or plan
- Provide a service
- Manage any risk to a child or young person
- Initiate or conduct an investigation

The safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child or young person takes precedence over the protection of confidentiality or an individual's privacy. Therefore, this information may be provided even if consent cannot be obtained.

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