



# Influences of pre-care characteristics on trajectories of wellbeing and placement stability for children in out-of-home care

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Australian Social Policy Conference, September 2023

# Longitudinal outcomes for children in care

- Children in out-of-home care are at greater risk of negative life outcomes
- Role of early risk and protective factors?
- Role of the quality and consistency of care?



# Aims of this analysis

- Identify subgroups of children in OOHC distinguishable based on child and family demographic and personal factors identified by others as playing a role in longer term outcomes for children in OOHC
- Explore how these factors (i.e., via the subgroups) are associated with a range of outcomes, and trajectories of these outcomes over time

# Method

POCLS - 962 children had Wave 4 interview data

## **Cluster analysis**

- Combinations of early factors, not just individually
- Clustered on measures of neighbourhood disadvantage, Aboriginality, disability, age of care entry

## **Latent Growth Curve Modelling**

- Trajectories of change in cognitive functioning, socio-emotional wellbeing, health, placement stability
- Multiple group analyses for clusters

# Results

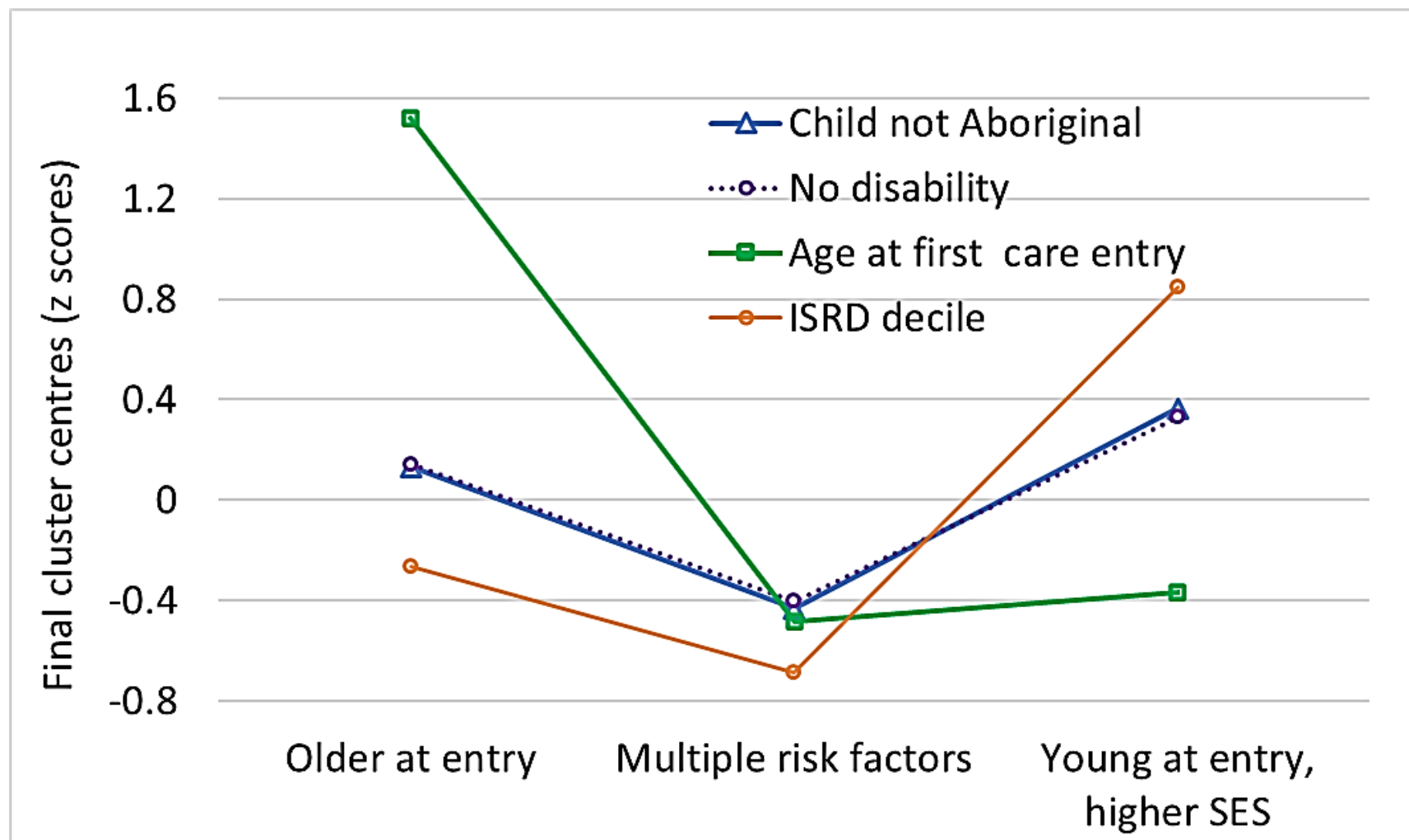


# Child characteristics on care entry (*N*=962)

Characteristic	Value
Age at entry into care (years), <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	2.47 (2.977)
Male, <i>n</i> (%)	484 (50.3%)
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, <i>n</i> (%)	344 (35.8%)
Neighborhood disadvantage (IRSD* score), <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	966.79 (72.719)
Has a disability, <i>n</i> (%)	181 (18.8%)
Age first reported for maltreatment concerns prior to entry into care (years), <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	0.17 (1.571)
Number of ROSH reports prior to first entry into care, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	7.85 (7.643)

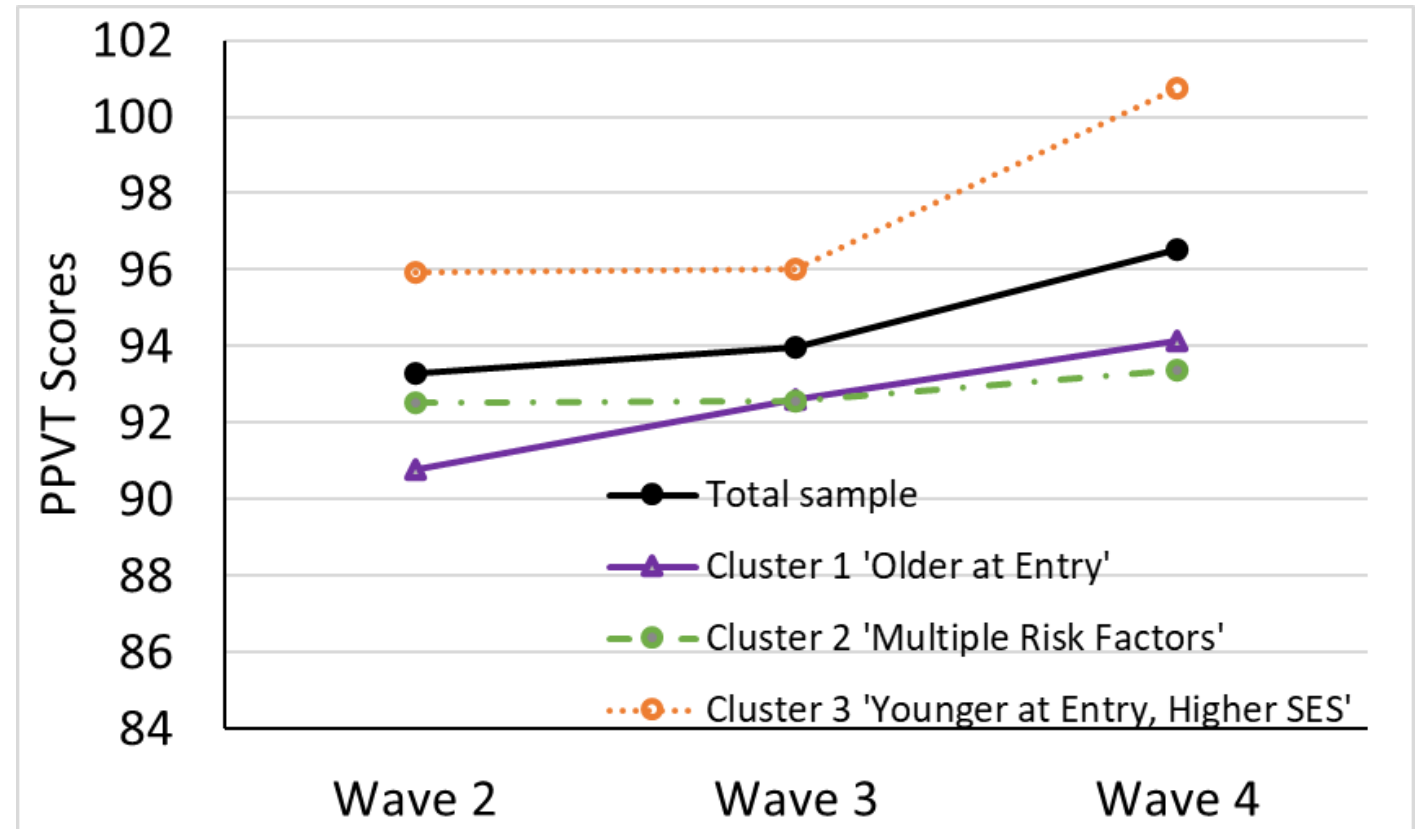
\* IRSD = Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, higher scores indicate greater socio-economic status (SES)

# Profile of each cluster



# Cognitive functioning

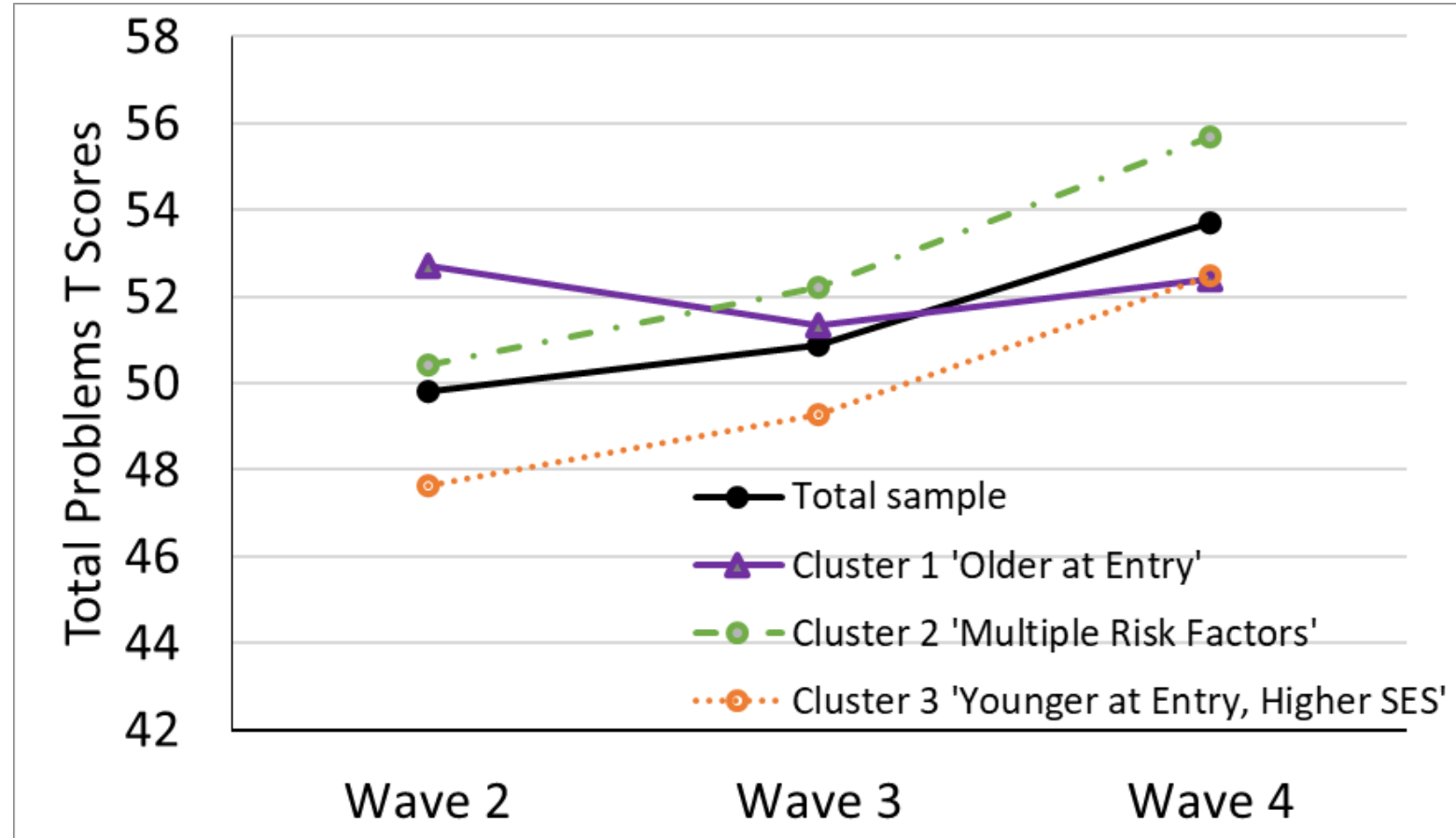
- Children entering care younger and with higher SES (orange) have higher cog. functioning scores at all waves
- Children entering care older had low scores to begin with, but showed steady incline, & trajectory at later stage aligned with total sample
- Little growth in scores for multiple risk cluster





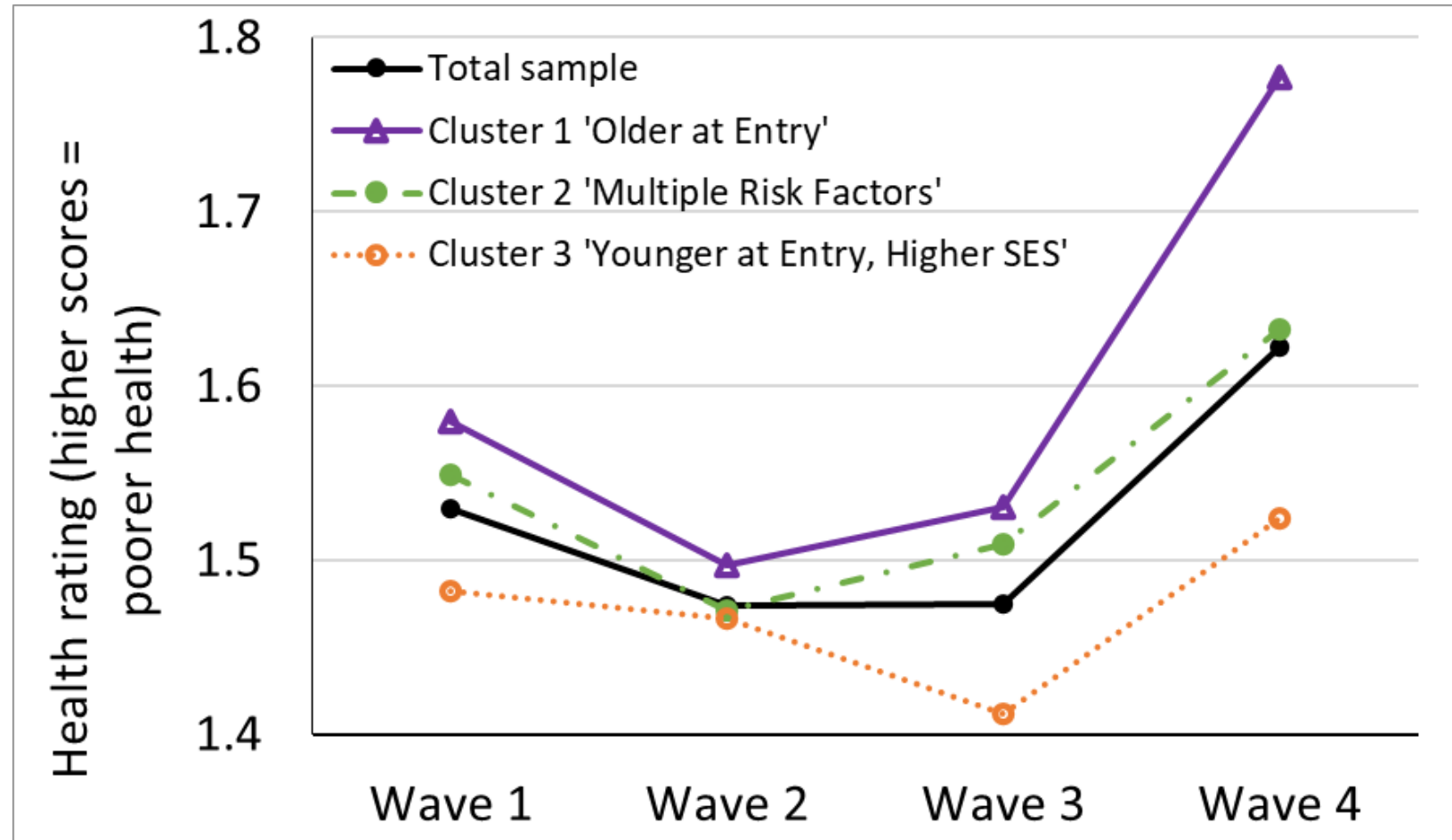
# Socio-emotional wellbeing

- Younger at entry/higher SES and multiple risk cluster show worsening behaviour over time
- Children entering care older show decrease in behaviour problems



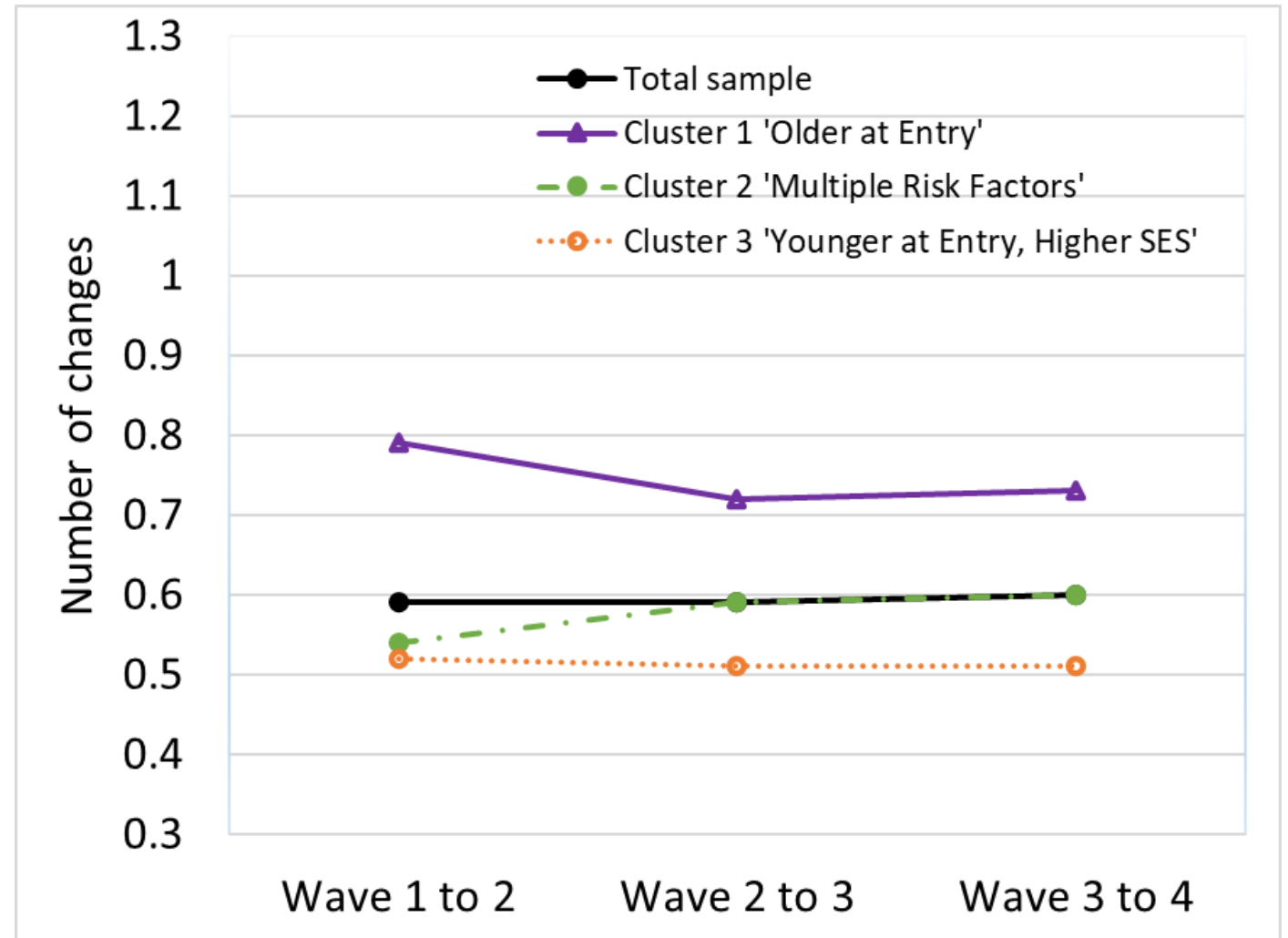
# Carer rating of child health

- Rate of change over time for clusters was similar
- Poorer health at Wave 4 for all clusters, despite initial improvements at Wave 2



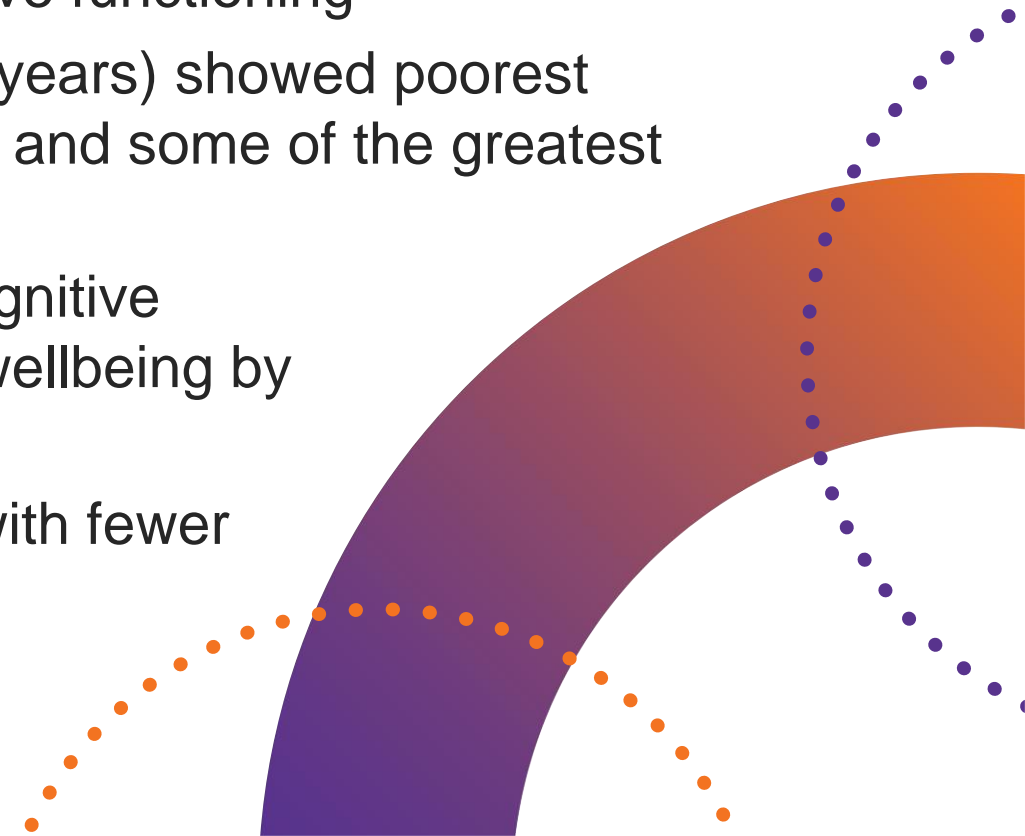
# Placement stability

- Children who enter care older experience more placement changes



# In summary

- Differing trajectories for cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes across clusters, but not for child health
- Younger at care entry/higher SES cluster started better and improved at a steeper rate than other clusters of children in cognitive functioning
- But, children who were older on care entry ( $M = 7.6$  years) showed poorest socio-emotional and cognitive functioning at Wave 2 and some of the greatest improvements by Wave 4
- Multiple risk cluster showed little improvement in cognitive functioning over time and poorest socio-emotional wellbeing by Wave 4
- Fewer placement changes for those entering care with fewer risk and younger



# Implications

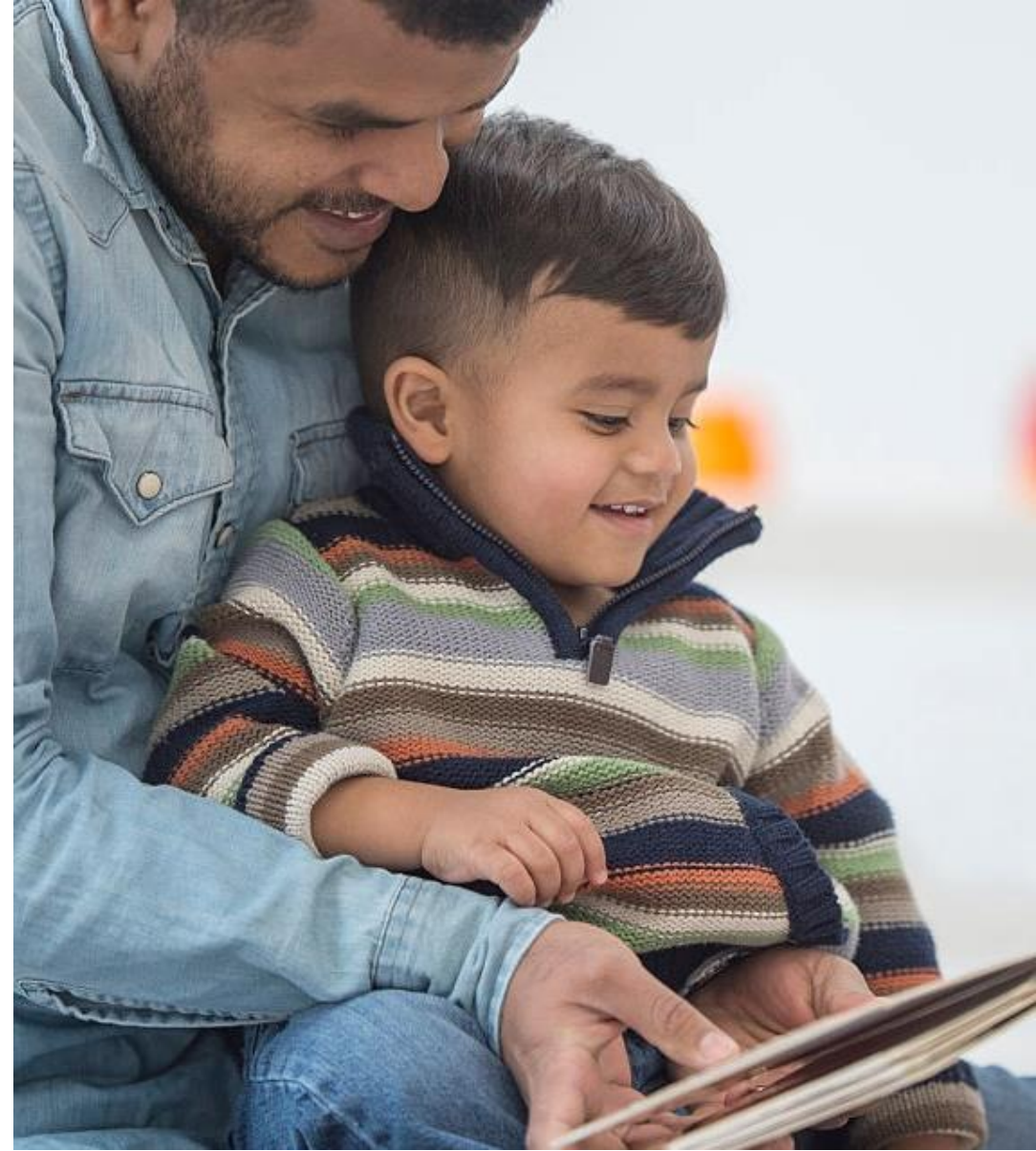
- Understand how combinations of risk & protective factors early in care impact on later wellbeing
- Placement/preservation decision making, particularly for those entering care from primary school age
- Interventions needed that support placement stability
- Policy reform (e.g., Safe Home for Life, Their Futures Matter, Permanency Support Program, Victorian and Aboriginal Family Preservation and Reunification Response)





# Limitations & future directions

- Disentangling relative role of pre-care and during care influences
- Missing data at Wave 2 for some variables
- Cases could opt in/out at each wave
- Includes children who had been restored
- Other factors that influence long-term outcomes?
- Other outcomes?



# Acknowledgements

Aboriginal families and traditional owners

NSW Dept of Communities & Justice

Emerging Minds

POCLS Team at FACSIAR

Judy Cashmore, Alan Taylor, Amy Conley Wright and Betty Luu

Children, young people, caregivers and professionals who participated in interviews and contributed data

Data custodians (linked datasets)



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