



# Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

**Australian Social Policy Conference**

12 September 2023

*The artist is a young person who grew up in care.*

*“The banner shows many pathways through the care system with a carer or caseworker acting as a guide, ultimately leading to independence for every young person. Whether we live with family or strangers, study, work, or just try our best, the paths we choose and are guided through in our youth are what we use to prepare ourselves for the happiest adulthood we can achieve” Billy Black*

# Acknowledgement

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay our respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

We remember the Stolen Generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families, communities and culture under past government practices.



# What is the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)?

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- The POCLS is the first large-scale prospective longitudinal study of children and young people aged 0-17 years entering out-of-home care (OOHC) for the first time under the *NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.
- It is the first study to link child protection, health, education and offending administrative data for children in care with firsthand accounts from children, caregivers, caseworkers and teachers.
- The POCLS data collection started in 2011 and tracks the OOHC experiences and permanency outcomes of 4,126 children and young people who entered care for the first time between May 2010 and October 2011.
- There have been 5 waves of data collection resulting in 10 years of in-depth information on children's experiences and developmental outcomes (Waves 1-5).
- Wave 6 commenced in 2023 and tracks the infant cohort transitioning to high school, and, for the first time, the young people who have aged out of OOHC at 18 years.



# What is the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)?

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- The aim of the POCLS is to provide significant new knowledge that will inform policy to improve the outcomes of children and young people in OOHC in terms of safety, permanency and wellbeing.
- The POCLS is designed to examine the factors influencing child development over time in the domains of safety, physical health, socio-emotional wellbeing and cognitive/language development.
- The study provides unique, high-quality information about the wellbeing trajectories of children in OOHC. Wave 1 provided a baseline indication of children's socio-emotional wellbeing, cognitive/learning ability, safety and physical health at entry to OOHC. The addition of each wave provides information on children's pathways and the factors impacting on outcomes.
- The results from the POCLS will inform OOHC policy and practice, and improve investment decisions and long-term outcomes of children.



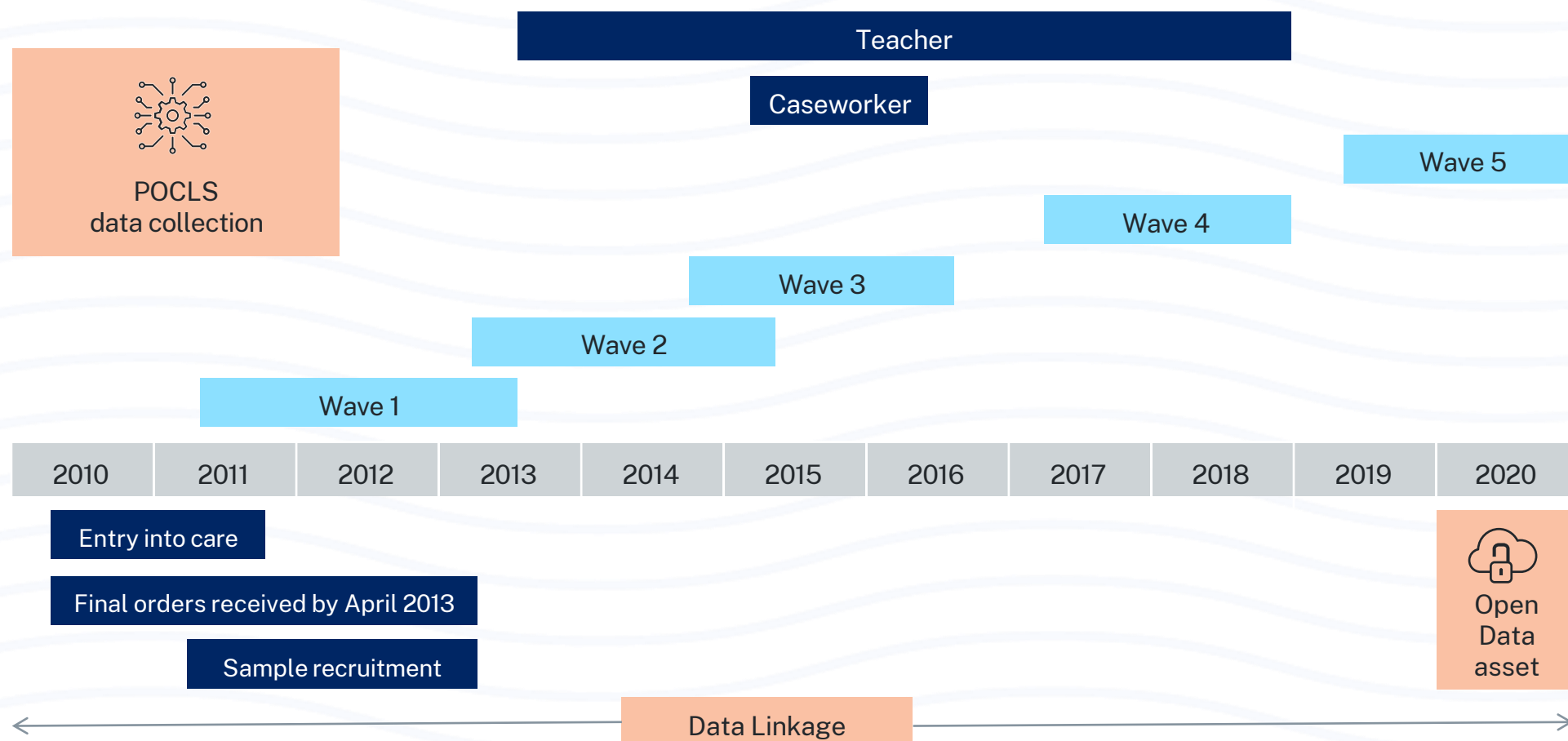


# How was the POCLS sample selected?

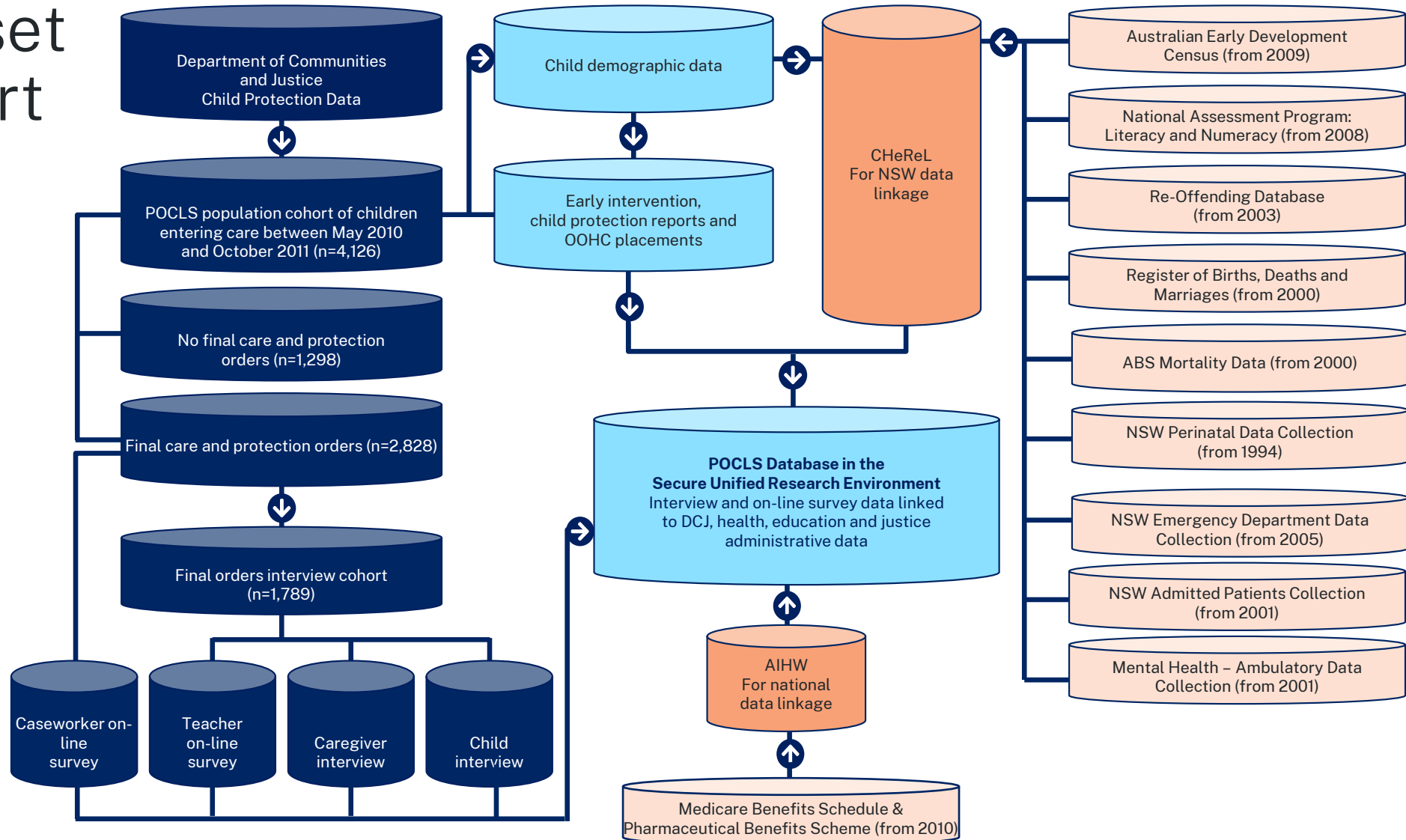


# POCLS Data Collection Timelines



To date, 5 waves of data collection have been undertaken at 18-24 month intervals using in-depth face-to-face and telephone interviews with the caregivers of around 1,000 children who went on to receive final care and protection orders by 30 April 2013 and agreed to participate in the study.



# POCLS data asset flowchart

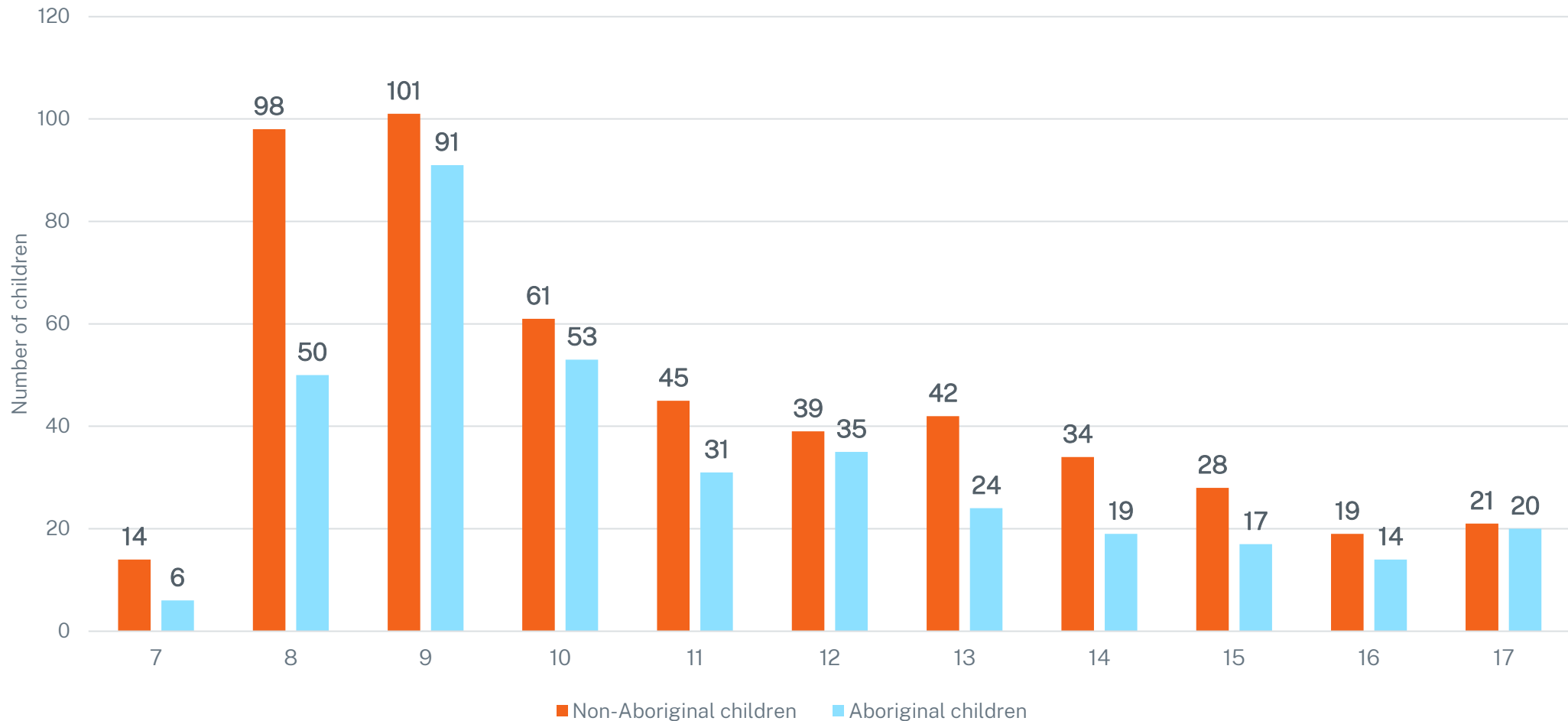


# How many children have participated in the POCLS interviews?

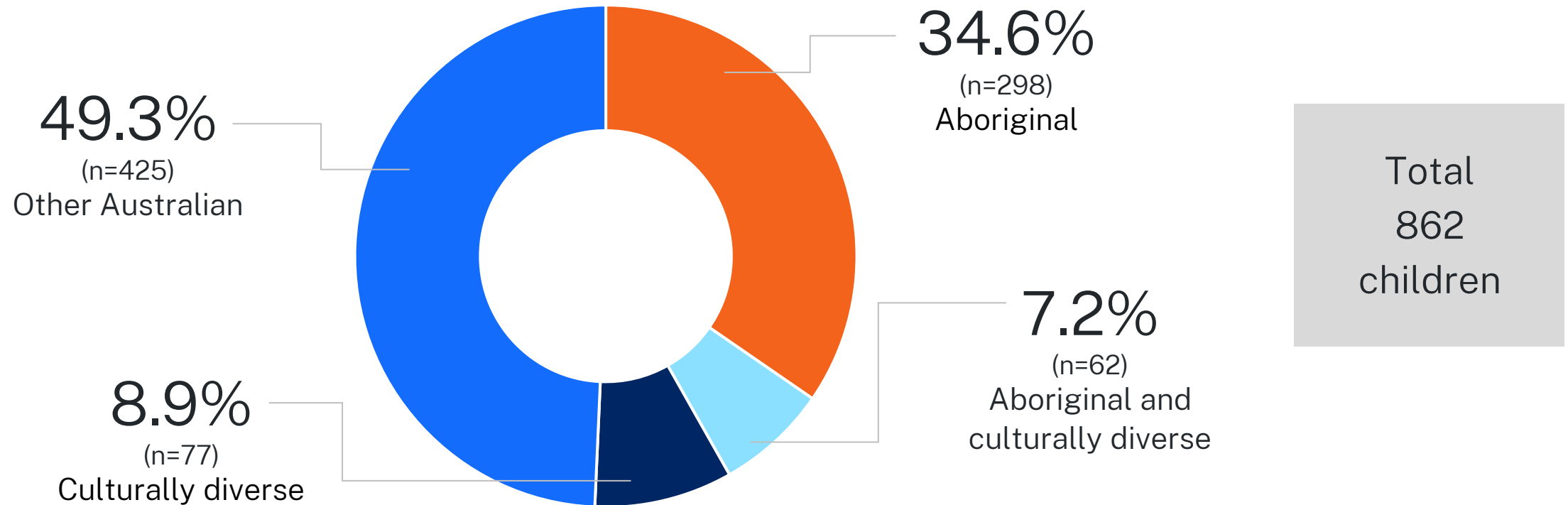
| Wave              |  |  | Total |
|-------------------|--|---|-------|
|                   | Aboriginal children  | Non-Aboriginal children   |       |
| Wave 1            | 512  | 773   | 1,285 |
| Wave 2            | 485  | 715   | 1,200 |
| Wave 3            | 422  | 611   | 1,033 |
| Wave 4            | 396  | 566   | 962   |
| Wave 5            | 360  | 502   | 862   |
| All five waves    | 239  | 384   | 623   |
| At least one wave | 610  | 911   | 1,521 |



# How old were the children in the POCLS at Wave 5?



# What is the cultural background of the children at Wave 5?



# More than a third of the children had exited OOHHC by Wave 5

## Number of children by placement type/exit reason



329

(38.2%)

Foster Care



207

(24.0%)

Relative/  
kinship Care



22

(2.6%)

Residential  
Care



190

(22.0%)

Guardianship



48

(5.6%)

Adopted



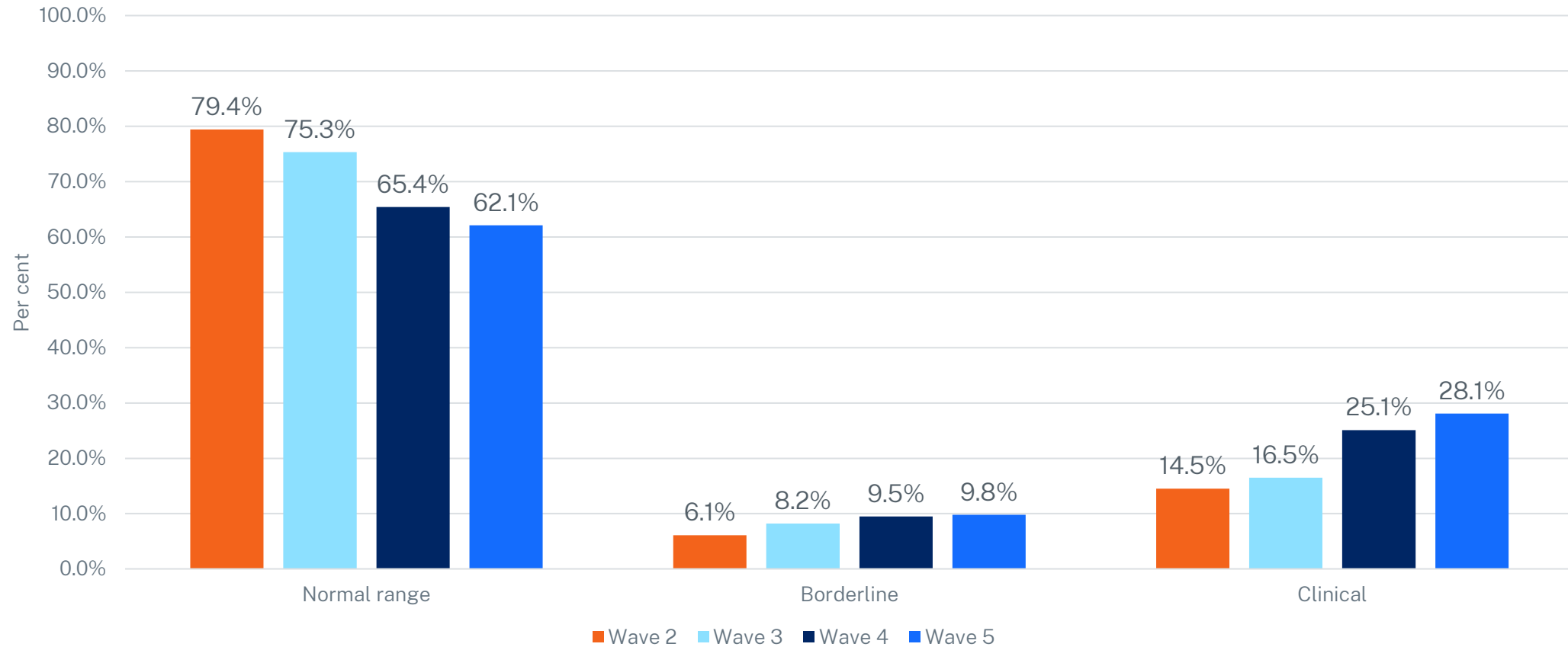
66

(7.7%)

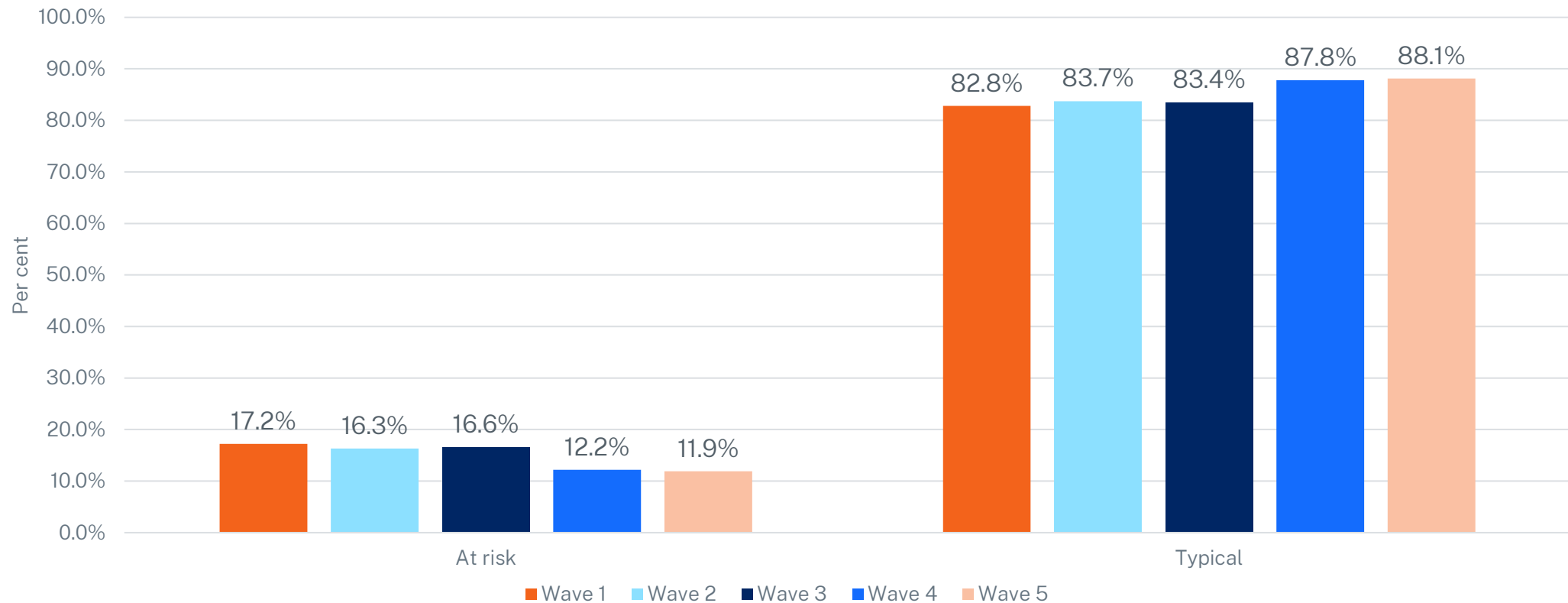
Restored

Total 862 children

# Children are less likely to be in the normal range for socio-emotional wellbeing over time

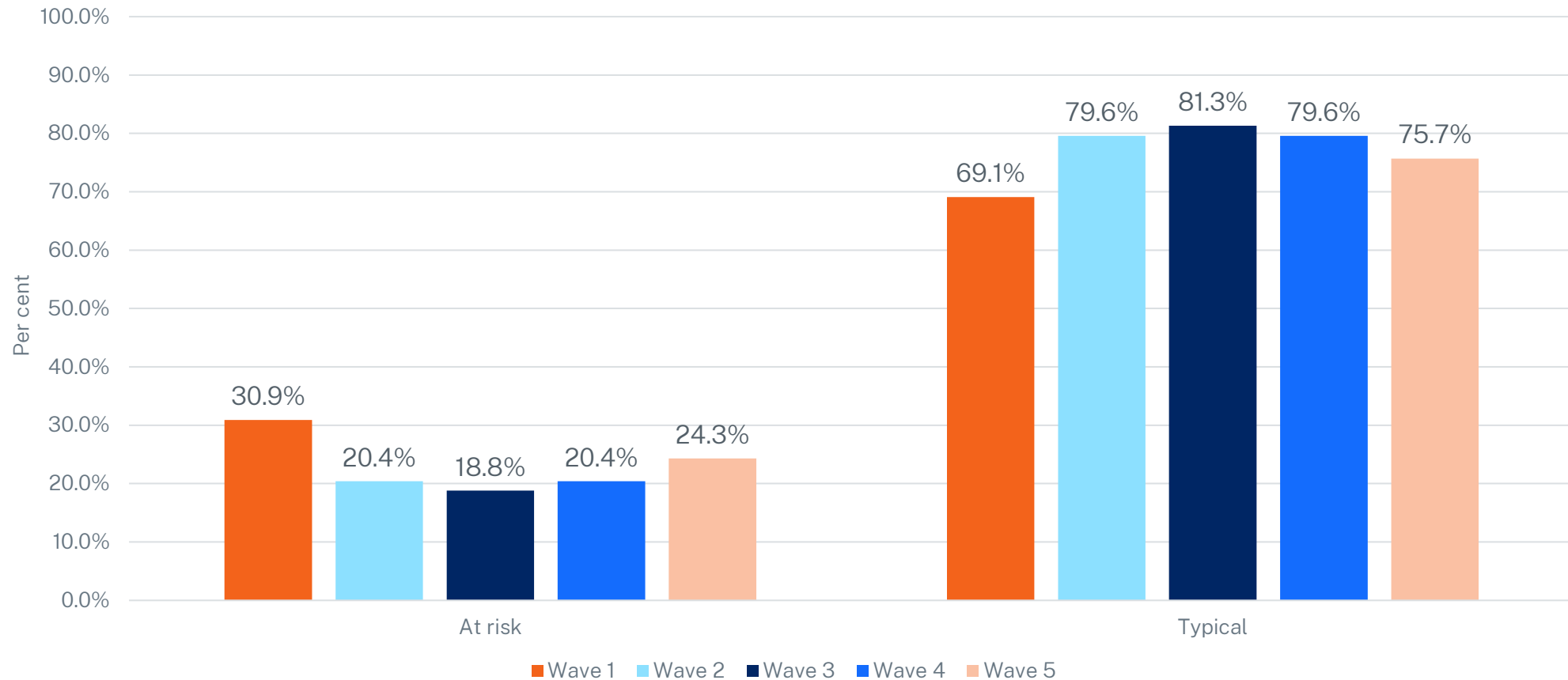


# Children are increasingly in the typical range for verbal ability over time





# Children are more likely to be in the typical range for non-verbal ability over time

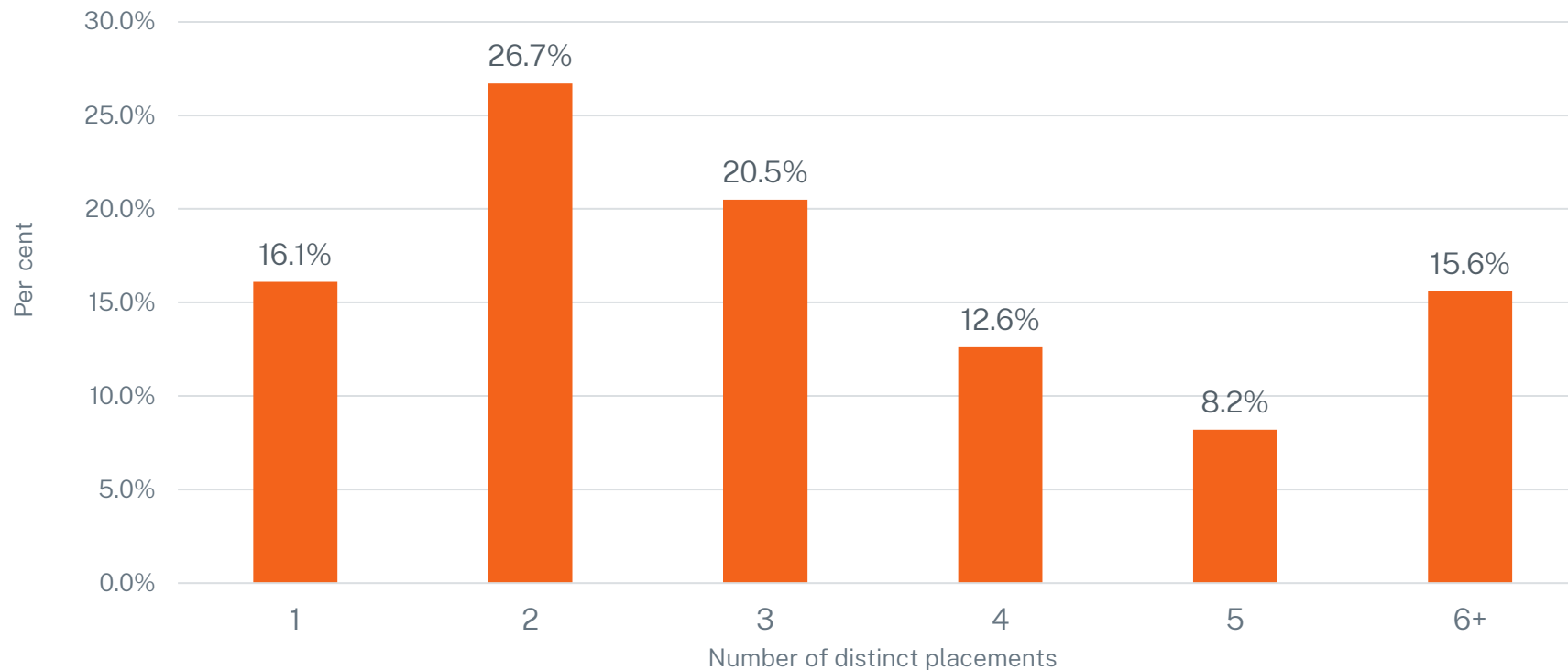


# Half of the Wave 5 participants have high needs in at least one area

|   | n          | %            |
|---|------------|--------------|
| <b>High needs</b>   |            |              |
| Behaviour only  | 77         | 15.1         |
| Verbal ability only   | 25         | 4.9          |
| Non-verbal ability only   | 65         | 12.7         |
| Behaviour and verbal  | 15         | 2.9          |
| Behaviour and non-verbal  | 33         | 6.5          |
| Verbal and non-verbal   | 23         | 4.5          |
| Behaviour, verbal and non-verbal                                    | 17         | 3.3          |
| <b>All normal/borderline/above normal ranges</b>                    | <b>255</b> | <b>50.0</b>  |
| <b>Total children who participated in all three tests in Wave 5</b> | <b>510</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Note: High needs are clinical range behaviour problems, and below normal range verbal and non-verbal abilities

# Child development is positively associated with placement stability

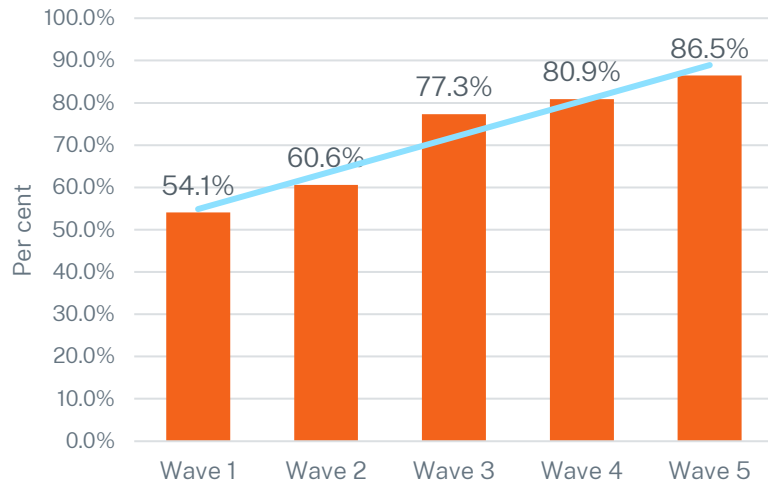


Changes in placement are more likely:

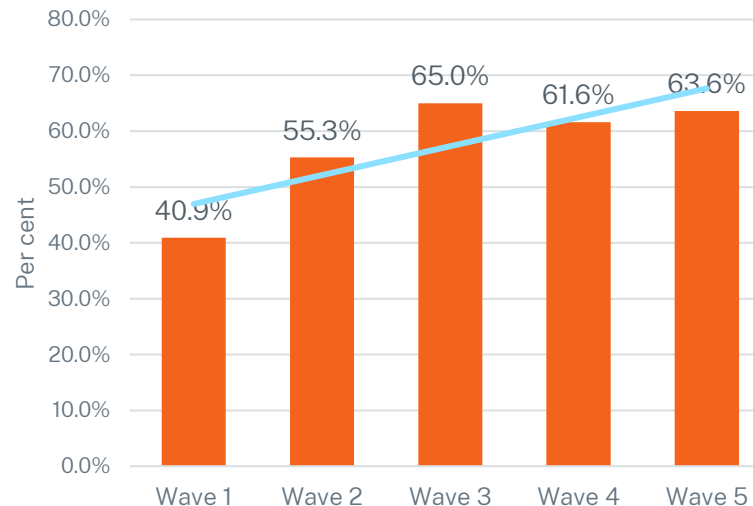
- for children who entered OOHC for the first time when they were 6 years and older
- for children placed in foster care compared with those in relative/kinship care

# Encouraging trends for cultural connections for Aboriginal children in OOHC

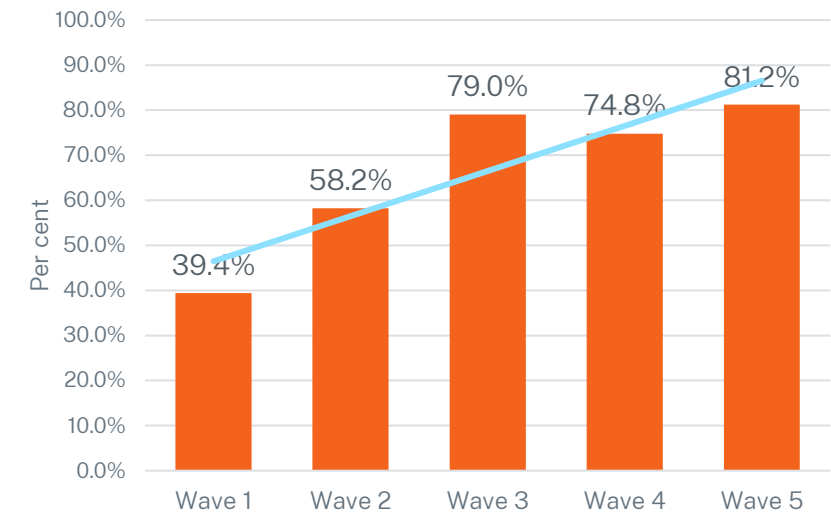
Discussions about their cultural identity and heritage



Socialised with their birth community



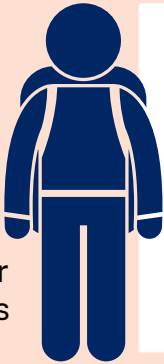
Engaged in cultural events or festivals



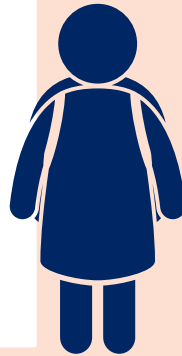
# Student wellbeing is directly related to educational engagement and performance

**35%**  
of boys

vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains



**29%**  
of all children in the POCLS on entry to school were developmentally vulnerable on at least two of the five AEDC domains



**24%**  
of girls

vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains



Higher number of ROSH reports were associated with **increased negative reactivity** and **increased overall problem behaviours** over time

About 5 -6 years after first entering OOHC (Wave 3), children aged 12-17 years had attended an average of



**3.7**  
schools



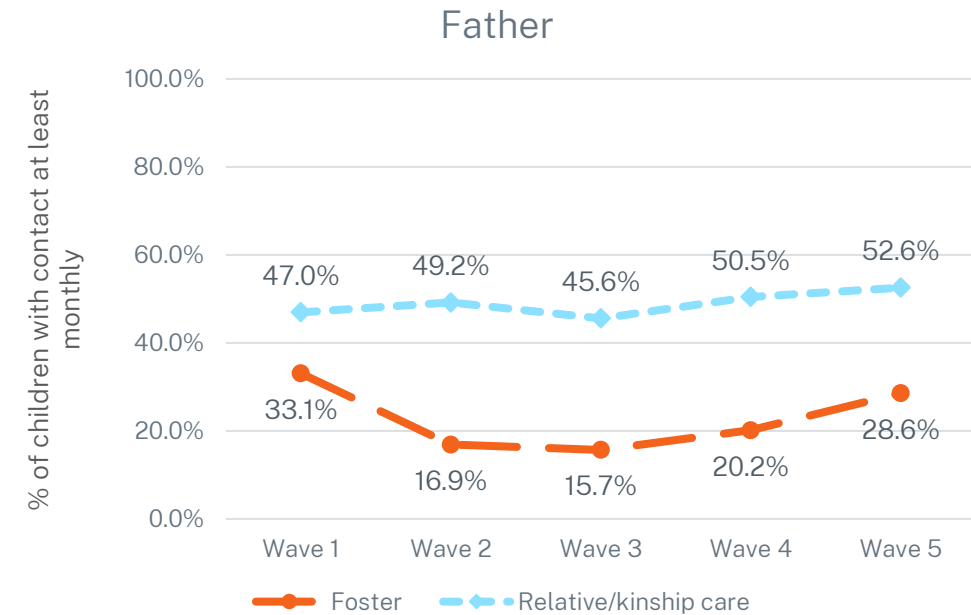
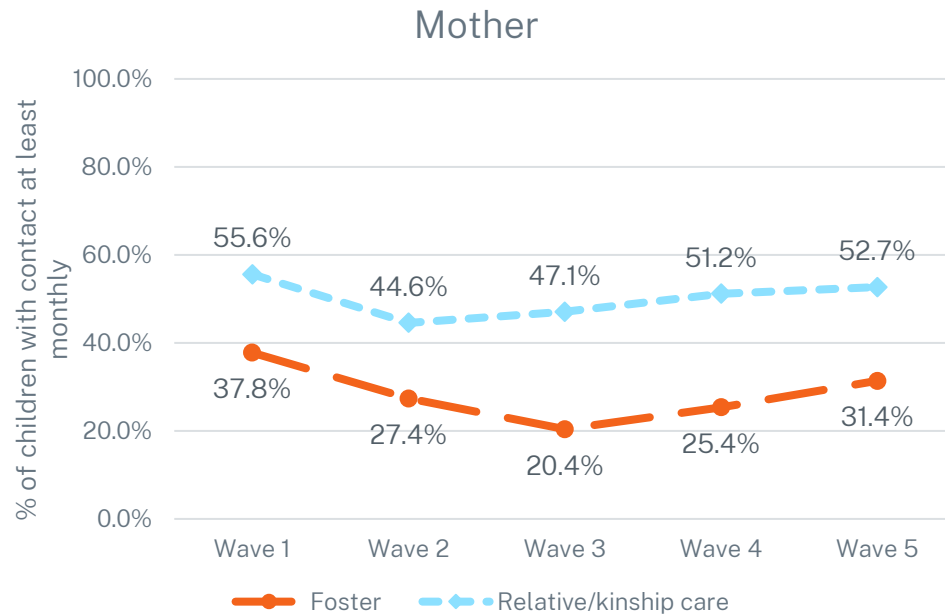
**20%**  
of children aged 12-17 reported they '**rarely or never**' or only '**sometimes**' understood the work in class

By Years 3 and 5 children with **more ROSH reports** scored **lower** on the NAPLAN





# Children in relative/kinship care have more frequent contact with family



Children who had 'at least monthly contact' were much more likely to have a good relationship with each of their family members than children with less frequent contact.

# Family time has a positive impact on children's socio-emotional development



Children aged 7–17 years indicated that the people who were ‘special and important’ to them and that they wanted to see more were their parents, siblings and grandparents, in that order, as well as their friends



Children who spent time with *both* or *at least one* parent had better socio-emotional wellbeing than those who had no family time with either parent



Children living with their siblings in the carer household, had significantly *lower* problems scores than those who were not, whether or not they had contact with siblings outside it.

# Emerging issues



POCLS has found that child development is positively associated with:

- Placement stability, noting caregiver satisfaction in their caring role and feeling support by caseworkers can prevent placement breakdown
- Children in relative/kinship care placements, noting there is a 'selection' effect, had significantly *lower* problem scores than children in foster care
- Cultural connections for Aboriginal children through socialising with their birth communities, noting an improvement in cultural identity and cultural activities overtime
- Educational engagement and performance
- Family time with both or at least one parent, noting children in relative/kinship care are more likely to have contact with family across all waves and that children in all placement types need more frequent or consistent time with their mother and father, and particularly with siblings
- Children being very happy living in their current home, having carers who were emotionally responsive, warm and non-hostile (in terms of parenting style).

# Further information

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POCLS Webpage: [www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways)

Study information and publication clearinghouse

