



# Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

**Placement stability and children's developmental outcomes: Evidence from the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study**  
Australian Social Policy Conference

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*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*

12 September 2023

# Acknowledgement

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I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet; the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people of the Canberra region; and pay my respect to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

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



# Ethics approval

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## **Human Research Ethics Committee**

University of New South Wales HREC (HC10335 & HC16542).

## **Aboriginal Ethics Committee**

Approval from Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) of NSW Ethics Committee (766/10).

## **NSW Department of Education**

State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) (2012260).

## **NSW Population & Health Services Research Ethics Committee**

Cancer Institute New South Wales (HREC/14/CIPHS/74).

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- POCLS background
  - Study overview
  - Measures of placement stability
  - Measures of developmental outcomes
  - Analysis method
  - Results
  - Limitations
  - Policy and practice implications

## **Study population cohort**

Entered OOHC for first time between  
May 2010 and October 2011  
(n=4,126)

## **Final orders cohort**

Children's Court order by April 2013  
(n=2,828)

## **Interview cohort**

(n=1,789)

W1 = 1,285

W2 = 1,200

W3 = 1,033

W4 = 962

W5 = 862

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- **Aim**
    - To examine the influence of placement stability on developmental outcomes of children in out-of-home care
  - **Hypothesis**
    - Placement stability is associated with better developmental outcomes
  - **Sample**
    - POCLS interview cohorts Waves 1-3 (unweighted data)

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- **Lack of consistent approach**
    - Number of placement changes
    - Patterns of placement changes
      - Type, number and time in placements
  - **New measure**
    - Number of distinct placement changes per 1,000 person-care days

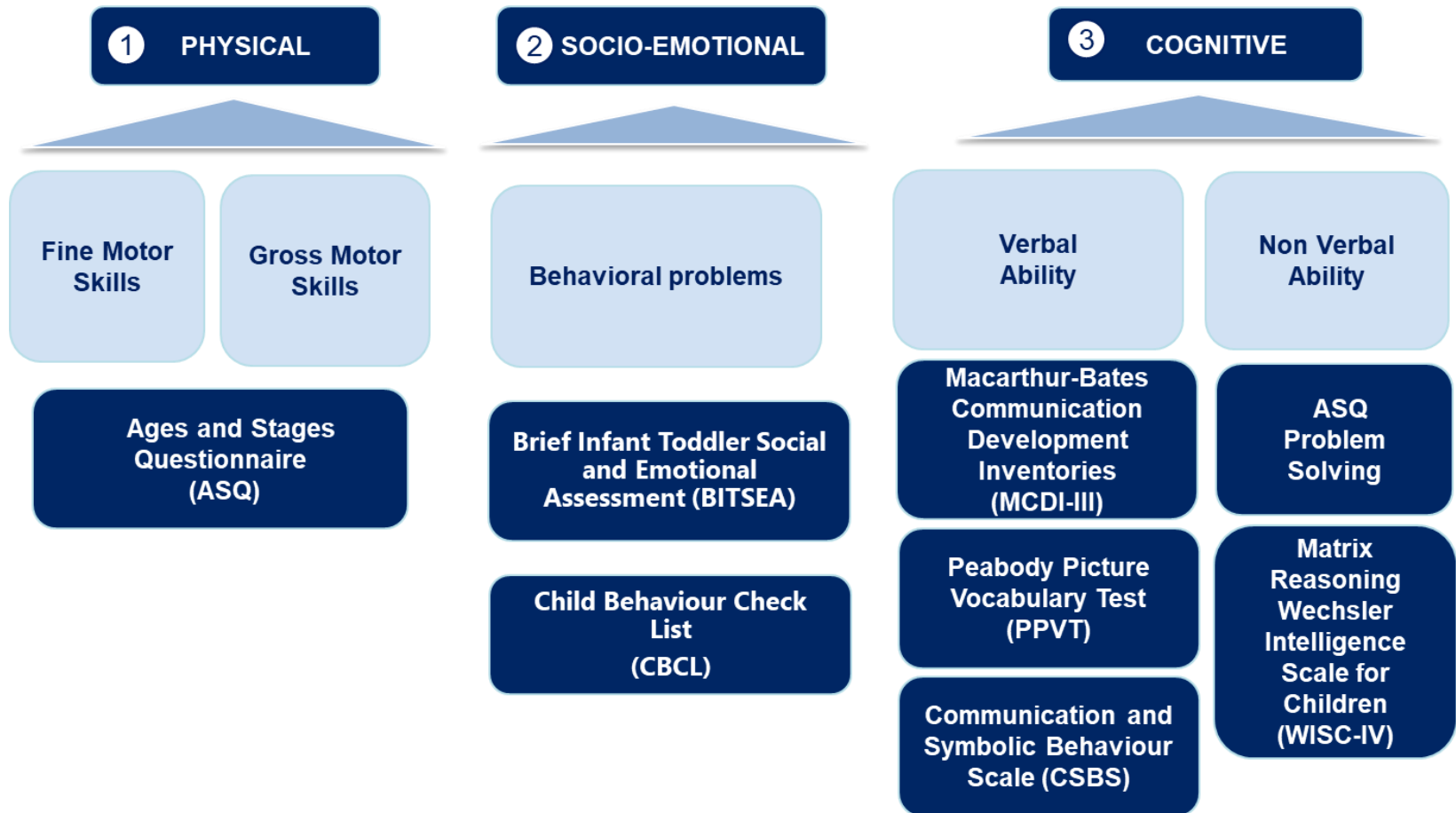
- What is a placement change?
  - Move between two carers (i.e., a change in carer ID)
- What is not a placement change?
  - Same carer ID for 2 consecutive placements
  - Emergency placements <7 days
  - Respite placements up to 21 days
- What else was considered?
  - Number of placement changes between interviews/waves
  - Duration of time in care



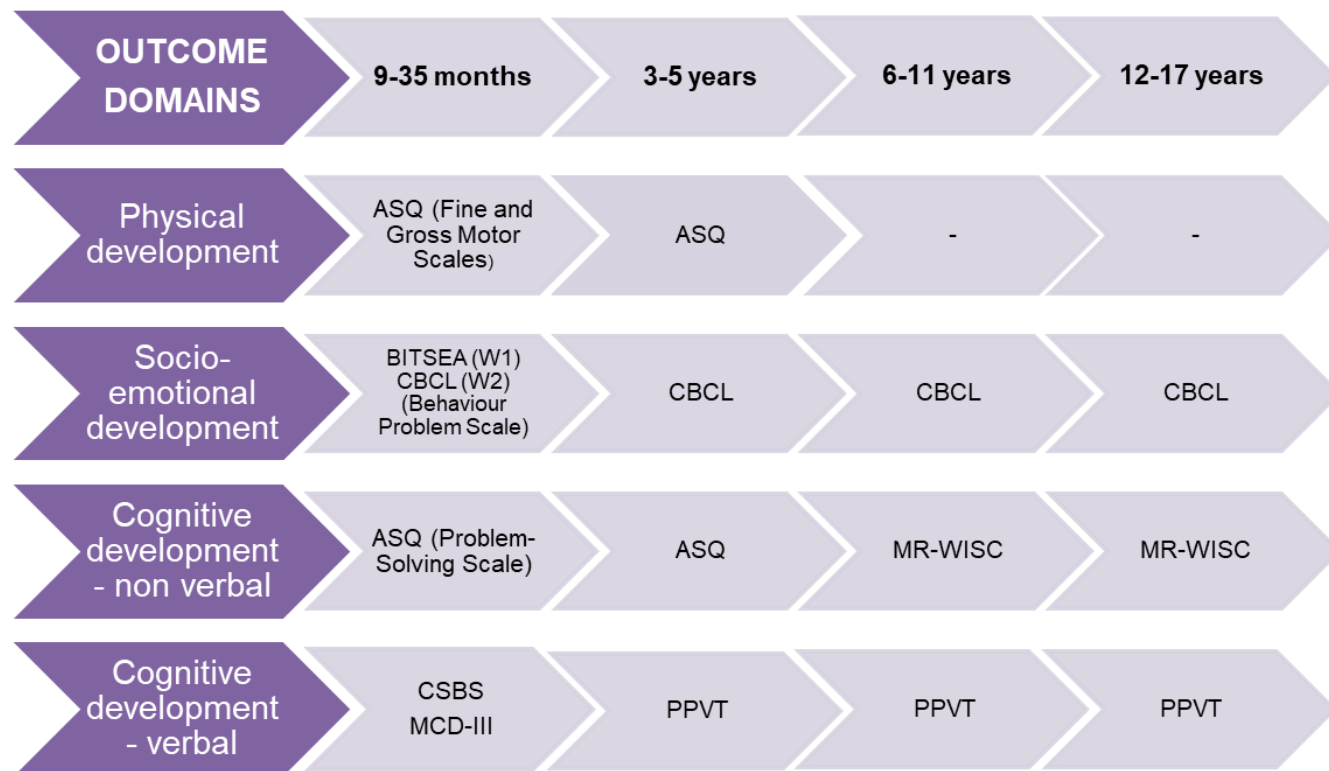
# Covariates included in analysis

- Child demographics
  - Age at entry to care, gender, Aboriginal status, CALD background
- Child protection history
  - Number and type of ROSH reports prior to entry to care
- Placement characteristics
  - Predominant placement type, district
- Carer characteristics
  - Cultural background, income, education
- Carer satisfaction
- Carer psychological distress on Kessler-10
- Social cohesion and trust
  - Perceived safety and unity of neighbourhood

# Developmental Outcome Domains



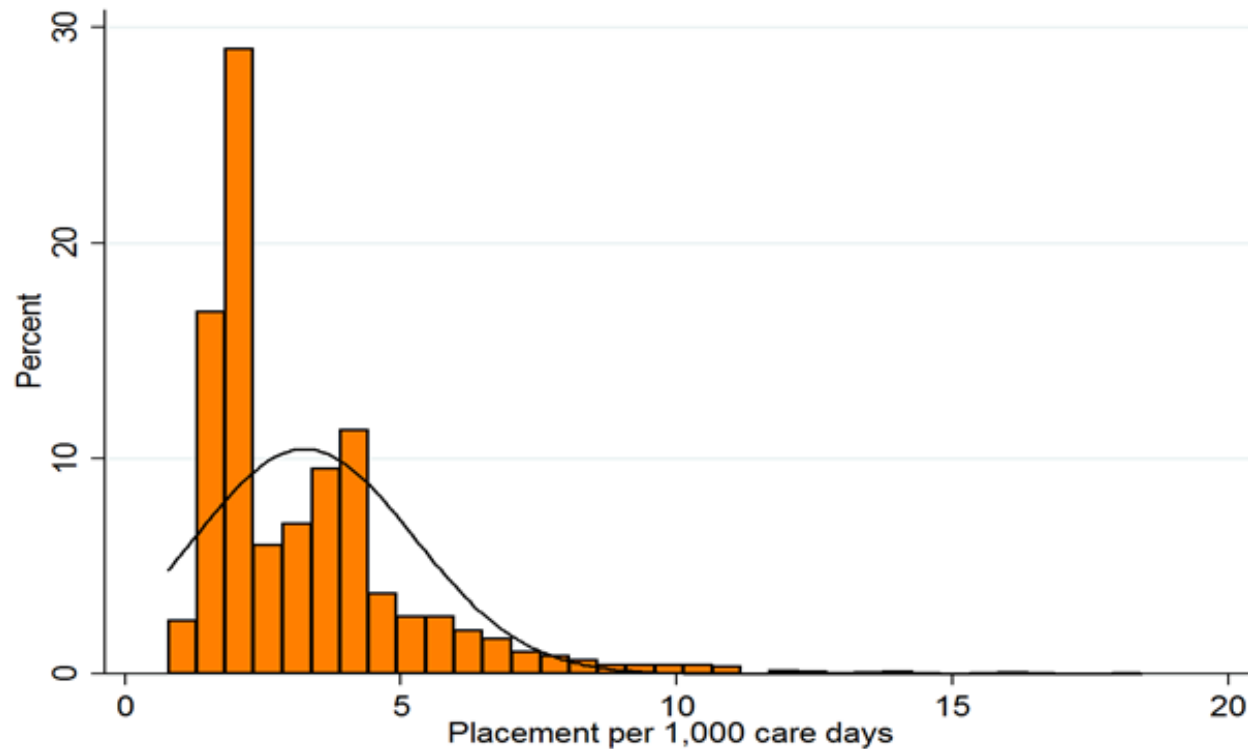
# Developmental Outcome Domains



Standardised measures used across outcome domains for different age groups of children

- Mixed effect (random intercept) modelling
  - Allows for examination of factors that were measured while accounting for factors that were not measured but may affect developmental outcomes over time
  - Mixed effect binary logit
    - Each developmental outcome converted into binary indicator (typical vs. atypical development)

# Results – Placement Stability



Placements per 1,000 care days ( $N = 3,156$  observations)

# Results – Children’s Developmental Outcomes over time

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- **Socio-emotional development**
  - More than half (57%) remained in the typical range and 14% in the atypical range across all three waves
- **Verbal development**
  - About two-thirds (64%) remained in the typical range and 5% in the atypical range across all three waves
- **Non-verbal development**
  - About half (55%) remained in the typical range and 7% in the atypical range across all three waves
- **Fine motor skills**
  - Almost half (44%) remained in the typical range and 10% in the atypical range across all three waves
- **Gross motor skills**
  - About two-thirds (64%) remained in the typical range and 5% in the atypical range across all three waves

# Results – Socio-Emotional Development

Variable	Average Marginal Effect	
Number of placements per 1,000 care days between waves	-0.012	*
Age at entry to out-of-home care (years)	-0.016	***
ROSH report type: (Y/N) (Ref No) psychological harm	-0.11	***
Relative and kinship care - non-Aboriginal	0.077	**
Carer age (Ref < 40 years)		
51-60 years	0.064	*
>=61 years	0.098	**
Carer satisfaction with (Ref Not satisfied)		
Working relationship with other agencies	0.197	***
Having enough information about child	0.126	***
Carer psychological distress (Ref Low)		
Moderate	-0.191	***
High	-0.186	***
Very high	-0.268	***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Model results (Average Marginal Effects) of the binary logit for socio-emotional development

# Results – Verbal Development

Variable	Average Marginal Effect	
Age at entry to out-of-home care (years)	-0.013	***
Relative and kinship care - Aboriginal	-0.093	*
Relative and kinship care - non-Aboriginal	0.055	**
Carer psychological distress (Ref Low)		
Very high	-0.168	*
DCJ District groups (Ref Hunter New England and Central Coast)		
Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western NSW	-0.060	*

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Model results (Average Marginal Effects) of the binary logit for verbal development



# Results – Non-Verbal Development

Variable	Average Marginal Effect	
Number of placements per 1,000 care days between waves	-0.017	***
Gender - male (Ref female)	-0.058	**
Aboriginal status - Aboriginal (Ref non-Aboriginal)	-0.040	*
Carer education (Ref High school)		
University	0.059	*
DCJ District groups (Ref Hunter New England and Central Coast)		
Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW	0.078	*
South Eastern, Northern & Sydney	0.130	***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Model results (Average Marginal Effects) of the binary logit for non-verbal development

# Results – Fine Motor Skills

Variable	Average Marginal Effect
Number of placements per 1,000 care days between waves	-0.013 *
Gender - male (Ref female)	-0.114 ***
ROSH report type: (Y/N) (Ref No) domestic violence	0.067 *
ROSH report type: (Y/N) (Ref No) carer drug and alcohol	0.072 *
Carer finance (Ref < \$40 K)	
\$40 K to < \$80 K	-0.073 *
Carer age (Ref < 40 years)	
>=61 years	0.140 **
Social Cohesion and Trust Scale	-0.012 **
DCJ District groups (Ref Hunter New England and Central Coast)	
Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western NSW	0.119 **
Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW	0.122 *

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Model results (Average Marginal Effects) of the binary logit for fine motor skills

# Results – Gross Motor Skills

Variable	Average Marginal Effect
Number of placements per 1,000 care days between waves	-0.021 ***
Gender - male (Ref female)	-0.045 *
ROSH report type: (Y/N) (Ref No) carer drug and alcohol	0.103 ***
Social Cohesion and Trust Scale	-0.008 ***
DCJ District groups (Ref Hunter New England and Central Coast)	
Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW	0.117 **
South Eastern, Northern & Sydney	0.094 *

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Model results (Average Marginal Effects) of the binary logit for gross motor skills

- Placement **instability** reduces the probability of being in the typical range for
  - Socio-emotional development
  - Non-verbal development
  - Gross motor and fine motor development
- Each placement per 1,000 care days reduces the probability of being in the typical range by 1-2% across each domain
- No association was found with verbal development over time

# Summary of Results

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- Children who **entered at an older age** were less likely to be in the typical range for socio-emotional and verbal development.
  - Children with **ROSH reports prior to entry involving psychological harm** were less likely to be in the typical range for socio-emotional development.
  - Children placed with **relative/kinship carer (non-Aboriginal)** were more likely to be in the typical range for socio-emotional and verbal development.

# Summary of Results

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- Children who lived with a carer that had moderate to very high **psychological distress** were less likely to be in the typical range socio-emotional and verbal development.
  - Children with carer **who were satisfied** in their caring role were more likely to be in the typical range socio-emotional wellbeing.
  - Carer factors such as **age, education, income** mattered in children's development.

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- All effect sizes were relatively small and there was no single dominant factor that influenced children's developmental outcomes overtime.
  - There was no single 'silver bullet' to improve child's developmental outcomes.

- Evidence of association and not causation
  - Not possible to distinguish if developmental outcome was a cause or consequence of placement stability
- Baseline development at time of entry into out-of-home care is not available
  - First data available is from Wave 1 interview
- Quality and timing of placement changes not considered in the placement stability measure
- Other factors not considered
  - Sibling placements, birth family contact, child disability



- The findings reinforce DCJ's current focus on placement stability as an area for intervention to improve children's development over time.
- Evidence from the POCLS also highlights a range of other factors including placement type and carer support that influence child development and require policy and practice focus.

# Acknowledgements

- **FACS** for the investment in research and leading the POCLS
- **I-view** who collected the data
- **Children and young people** who are participating in the study
- **Carers and birthparents** who are participating in the study
- **Caseworkers, childcare and school teachers** who assisted with sample recruitment and completed on-line surveys
- **Create Foundation, AbSec and Adopt Change** for assisting during the study design stage and supporting participants
- **Stakeholders and experts** who have provided support, assistance and advice



# 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

