Meeting the health needs of children not on the out-of-home care (OOHC) Health Pathway

What is the OOHC Health Pathway?
The OOHC Health Pathway (Pathway) was developed in 2010 to improve health outcomes for children and young people entering statutory OOHC in NSW. The Pathway is a joint initiative of the Ministry of Health and Family and Community Services (FACS).

The Pathway is open to all children and young people who entered statutory OOHC after 2010. Children and young people currently in statutory OOHC who are not on the Pathway should be referred when they turn 15 and their leaving care planning commences. The young person must provide their consent to commence on the Pathway.

If a child or young person in OOHC is not able to be placed on the Pathway, because they entered statutory care prior to 2010, it is still important that they receive timely screening, assessment, intervention, monitoring and review of their health needs.

This can be done by utilising some of the tools used as part of the Pathway without the direct involvement of the District OOHC Health Coordinator.

The key messages below provide further information about how to effectively meet the health needs of children and young people in OOHC who are not eligible to be placed on the Pathway.

Health Screening

How can children or young people not on the OOHC Health Pathway have their health needs screened?

Children and young people in OOHC who are not on the Pathway are required to undertake a Primary Health Screen to ensure their health needs are identified.

If a child or young person is not on the Pathway their caseworker must work with the carer to ensure the child or young person’s health needs are met by using the OOHC Primary Health Screen (2A) Form used as part of the Pathway process.

Below are the age specific 2A Primary Health Screen Forms which can be used for children and young people in OOHC:

- Under 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-11 years
- 12-18 years
This form will be provided to a primary healthcare practitioner (e.g. General Practitioner (GP), Nurse Practitioner, Child and Family Health Nurse or other speciality nurse or Aboriginal Health Practitioner) to conduct a primary health screen. Carers should be encouraged to book a longer appointment so that the health professional undertaking the primary health screen has adequate time to complete the assessment.

When completed the 2A Primary Health Screen Form must be returned to the child or young person’s caseworker.

**Health Assessment**

**How should issues identified through a 2A Primary Health Screen be followed up for children or young people not on the OOHC Health Pathway?**

If issues are identified through the 2A Primary Health Screen they will need to be investigated and followed up. The GP or health practitioner will organise for a referral(s) for the child or young person to attend the appropriate follow-up service(s).

It should be noted that it is not necessary for a child or young person to undertake a separate eyesight or hearing test as their vision and hearing will be assessed as part of their 2A Primary Health Screen.

If a child undertakes a 2A Primary Health Screen and several areas of concern are identified for follow up, their caseworker can seek the assistance of a Paediatrician to coordinate the referral process.

If a young person undertakes a 2A Primary Health Screen and several areas of concern are identified for follow up, their caseworker can seek the assistance of a Youth Health Specialist to coordinate the referral process.

The Care Act defines a child, as “a person who is under the age of 16 years” and young person as “a person who is aged 16 years or above but who is under the age of 18 years”.

**Health Intervention**

**How should the findings of the 2A Primary Health Screen and any additional assessment of children or young people not on the OOHC Health Pathway be utilised?**

The caseworker will need to incorporate findings from the child or young person’s 2A Primary Health Screen and any further follow up health assessments into their Case Plan or Leaving Care Plan.
The child or young person will then receive health services as identified in their Case Plan or Leaving Care Plan. The child’s caseworker will encourage the carer to follow up on all recommended therapy/services for the child or young person. Where possible, services that are publicly funded should be sought for the child or young person.

**Health Monitoring and Review**

**How are the health needs of a child or young person not on the OOHC Health Pathway monitored and reviewed?**

If a child or young person is not on the Pathway, their health needs must be reviewed annually. The caseworker needs to work with the child or young person’s carer to ensure their health needs are met using the relevant 2A Primary Health Screen Form (see above for link to forms). These forms can be used as a guide for health review.

If issues are identified through the review, they should be investigated and followed up. The GP or health professional should organise for a referral(s) to be made to appropriate follow-up services.

The caseworker needs to incorporate findings from the child or young person’s review into their Case Plan or Leaving Care Plan.