

Meeting the health needs of children and young people through the out-of-home care (OOHC) Health Pathway

Children and young people in OOHC often have increased levels of unmet health needs, compared with their peers. A child or young person's experience of abuse and trauma can significantly impact on their physical, developmental, and psychological health and wellbeing.

What is the OOHC Health Pathway?

In 2010, the OOHC Health Pathway was established 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 was designed to ensure that each child or young person in statutory OOHC undertakes **screening, assessment, intervention, monitoring and review** of their health needs.

A summary of the key steps of the Pathway and where responsibility lies for implementation has been developed for caseworkers see:

[Factsheet OOHC Health Pathway: a caseworker's guide](#)

These Questions and Answers have been developed to clarify issues that have arisen for caseworkers and other FACS staff implementing the Pathway.

Which children and young people are able to be placed on the OOHC Health Pathway?

The Pathway is open to all children and young people who entered statutory OOHC after July 2010. In Western NSW District the Pathway is open to children and young people who entered statutory OOHC from 2013.

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.

For young people getting ready to leave care the Pathway also focuses on:

- developing increased health literacy
- establishing links with general practice/primary health care; and
- obtaining access to personal medical records.

How does health screening occur for children and young people on the OOHC Health Pathway?

Referrals to the Health Pathway should be made as soon as possible, ideally within 14 days of interim orders being obtained, to allow enough time for health assessments to be arranged.

The Primary Health Screen will need to be conducted by a healthcare practitioner (e.g. General Practitioner (GP) Nurse Practitioner, Child and Family Health Nurse, Youth Nurse or Aboriginal Health Practitioner).

Age specific 2A Primary Health Screen Forms have been developed to ensure that all health domains for children and young people are properly assessed. These forms can be accessed below:

[Under 1 year](#)

[1-5 years](#)

[6-11 years](#)

[12-18 years](#)

Caseworkers must not develop or use forms that are independent of the established 2A Primary Health Screen Forms.

What health needs of children and young people on the OOHC Health Pathway are assessed through the Primary Health Screening process?

The Primary Health Screening process should assess the following:

- Physical health
- Growth and development
- Vision
- Hearing
- Psychosocial and mental health
- Oral health
- Immunisation
- Nutrition
- Sexual health (as age appropriate)
- Drug and alcohol (as age appropriate)
- Safety
- Responding to concerns raised by carers, or the child or young person.

A primary health screen ensures that children and young people are referred for comprehensive assessment and intervention services where required. It is only necessary to refer a child to a paediatrician if required.

Is it necessary to organise separate eyesight or hearing checks for a child or young person on the OOHC Health Pathway if they have undertaken a 2A Primary Health Screen?

No, it is not necessary to organise a separate eyesight or hearing test for a child or young person as their vision and hearing will be assessed as part of their primary health screen. The annual or six monthly health review should determine whether there are newly presenting issues with a child or young person's vision or hearing.

The 2A Primary Health Screen form includes space for the outcome of eyesight and hearing checks to be included. Caseworkers must not use forms that are independent of the 2A Primary Health Screen Form.

If a health professional identifies concerns with a child or young person's eyesight or hearing during the 2A screening process then they should refer them to an appropriate practitioner for a full assessment.

If a carer has concerns about the eyesight or hearing of the child or young person in their care they can raise these concerns with their GP for potential referral to an appropriate health practitioner.

Is it necessary to organise a separate oral health assessment for a child or young person in OOHC?

Oral health checks are recommended for all children under 18 years of age through public oral health services.

All children less than one year old should have their teeth screened by a child health professional with oral health training. All children and young people who are aged one or older should have an oral health assessment by a dental professional. Frequency of dental visits should depend on a child or young person's individual needs, though as a minimum a dental assessment should occur annually.

Children and young people on the OOHC Health Pathway may receive dental services through a Public Dental Clinic. When a child or young person's 2A Health Screen is organised the OOHC Health Coordinator should provide advice on how to access a clinic and what services can be provided.

The Australian Government also provides financial support for basic dental services to eligible children and young people aged between two and 17. Centrelink will determine if a child or young person is eligible to receive the Child Dental Benefit Schedule and will then advise carers in writing.

Caseworkers should guide and encourage carers to contact Centrelink to find out if they are eligible to receive the Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

How can I ensure that a child or young person on the OOHC Health Pathway with a Health Management Plan is able to have it reviewed?

Participation in the OOHC Health Pathway enables a child or young person in statutory OOHC to have a Health Management Plan developed. The Health Management Plan should form part of the child or young person's overall Case Management Plan or Leaving Care Plan.

A child's or young person's Health Management Plan must be reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant to their needs. The review needs to take place at least every six months for children under five and at least every 12 months for those over the age of five.

Caseworkers should request that the Local Health District OOHC Health Coordinator review the child or young person's Health Management Plan.

If the OOHC Health Coordinator does not have the capacity to review the Health Management Plan then the relevant 2A Primary Health Screen Form can be used as a guide for review. The caseworker should work with the carer to ensure the relevant 2A Primary Health Screen Form is provided to a primary health care practitioner (see above for links to 2A Screening Forms) to review the Plan.

If the OOHC Health Coordinator does not have capacity to review the child or young person's Health Management Plan, and another healthcare professional conducts a review and revises the Plan, the revised Plan should then be returned to the caseworker and to the OOHC Health Coordinator.

If any issues are identified through the review process they should be investigated and followed up. The GP or health professional is required to organise for a referral(s) to be made to appropriate follow-up services. It is recommended that children and young people visit a GP in a family practice who has time to build an ongoing relationship with them in order to manage their health care effectively.

What resources are available to help case workers implement the OOHC Health Pathway?

For information available to health practitioners providing health assessments for children and young people in OOHC see:

[NSW Clinical Assessment Guidelines for children and young people in OOHC](#)

For details of the OOHC Health Coordinator in your district see:

[Contacting your local OOHC Health Pathway Coordinator](#)

For information available to assist carers to implement the Pathway see:

[Factsheet OOHC Health Pathway: carer's guide](#)