

Health Assessments, Intervention and Review for children and young people entering statutory Out of Home Care (The OOHC Health Pathway Program)

Children and young people in out-of-home care

Children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) often have high and unmet health needs and are more disadvantaged and vulnerable than other children in general.

NSW Health provides health assessments for children and young people entering statutory out-of-home care (OOHC) who are expected to remain in care for longer than 90 days. As at June 2010, 5749 children and young people entered statutory OOHC for the first time. Of these, 1,770 (31%) were Aboriginal.

The program is an outcome of the Justice Wood Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection in NSW to address the health needs of children and young people in statutory OOHC.

Interagency approach for delivering the Health Assessments

NSW Health, in collaboration with the Department of Family and Community Services, Community Services Division, developed an interagency framework, a Model Pathway to support the health assessment process - *Model Pathway for the Comprehensive Health and Developmental Assessments for All Children and Young People Entering Out-of-Home Care*. The journey of the child is at the core of the model, which also promotes close collaboration between NSW Health, Community Services, and OOHC service providers. The role of health professionals, other government agencies, non-government agencies and carers is also articulated.

A Memorandum of Understanding between NSW Health and Community Services on *Health Screening, Assessment Intervention and Review for Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care* supports this collaboration.

Health screening, assessments, intervention and review

Children and young people entering statutory OOHC receive a primary health screening / assessment, which is commenced within 30 days of a child or young person entering OOHC.

Primary screening and assessment are undertaken by a broad range of health care providers, including General Practitioners, Aboriginal Medical Services and Child and Family Health Nurses. Following these assessments, children, young people and carers will also have someone familiar to go to for support for

the many issues – big and small – that every family has (e.g., rashes, bumps, weights and measures and general advice).

Based on the findings of the primary health assessment, children and young people may then be referred for a comprehensive multidisciplinary health assessment. In partnership with the child/young person, their carer, and/or their case worker each child or young person has a Health Management Plan developed for and with them based on the results of the assessments. The Health Management Plan identifies their state of health, recommended interventions and appropriate review process.

Phased approach to health assessments

Key benefits of Health Assessments for children and young people in out-of-home care:

- early identification of health needs
- child-focused approach to health assessment and intervention places the child at the centre and supports carers in decision-making about health care needs
- targeted and culturally appropriate health interventions and resultant improved long-term health outcomes, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- continuity of care, particularly for those with multiple, ongoing and complex conditions
- over the longer term, improved health outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care
- better management of client health information, through the use of a health referral form, and integration of the health management plan with the out of home care case plan
- collaborative and sustainable service system reform with stronger links between child protection practice, health care providers, carers and Non-Government Organisations providing OOHC

Health assessments for children and young people in OOHC are being implemented in a staged approach. The first phase is focused on children and young people entering statutory OOHC who are expected to remain in care for 90 days or more.

Each Local Health District (LHD) in NSW has established service delivery models for the coordination, delivery, monitoring and reporting on OOHC health assessments. Local agreements exist between LHDs and Community Services, which seek to support timely referrals to the health assessments for children and young people entering out-of-home care.

In 2011-12, following the allocation of additional time limited funding, children from birth to age 5 years in OOHC were the focus of the second phase. Additional clinics through tertiary paediatric hospitals for the provision of comprehensive multidisciplinary health

assessments to children aged 0-5 years in statutory OOHC were led by the Sydney Children's Hospital Network and the Hunter New England Local Health District.

NSW Health and Community Services are working together to develop local service delivery models for the third phase of implementation – which will target young people expected to transition from OOHC within the next 12-18 months.

Eligibility and referrals

Those eligible for the program include children and young people aged 0 – 17 years who are entering statutory OOHC and expected to remain in care for 90 days or more.

Referrals are initiated by Community Services through the use of a Health Referral Form. The Health Referral Form is a key document to collect health information of a child or young person entering OOHC and is completed by Community Services caseworker.

Following the health assessment, access to health services for children and young people in statutory OOHC is based on clinical need.

Facilitating access to health services

OOHC Co-ordinators have been appointed in Local Health Districts across NSW to enhance best practice in the provision of health assessments to children and young people entering statutory OOHC.

OOHC Coordinators and Community Services staff work together to support the timely and coordinated provision of primary and comprehensive health and developmental screening, assessment, intervention and review for children and young people entering OOHC.

Transition of OOHC to NGO Sector

To help vulnerable children and families, the NSW Government is expanding the Non-Government sector's role in providing OOHC services. As the OOHC case management and care is in transition to NGO agencies, NSW Health will continue to consult with the NGO sector and Community Services on health assessments for children and young people in OOHC. Children and young people placed in statutory care with NGOs are eligible for the Program, however must initially be referred by Community Services.

Development of NSW Clinical Assessment Guidelines for children and young people in OOHC

NSW Health led the development of the released *National Clinical Assessment Framework for Children and Young People in OOHC* through the Child Health and Wellbeing Subcommittee of the Australian Population Health Development Principal Committee, together with other State and Territory representatives.

Based on this Framework, in October 2013 NSW Health released the 'NSW Health Clinical Practice Guidelines for health assessment of children and young people in OOHC'. The Guidelines provide clear best practice approaches in the provision of health assessments for children and young people in OOHC to support health professionals working with these children and young people.

Evaluation of implementation of Health Assessments

NSW Health and Community Services have agreed to a joint approach to the evaluation of the implementation of the health assessment processes and coordination for children and young people entering statutory OOHC. The evaluation commenced in May 2013 and is due for completion in March 2014.

This evaluation will identify effective practices and processes related to the provision of health assessments that support health outcomes for children and young people in OOHC.

For more information

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