Their childhood. Our responsibility.

We are calling for an independent Royal Commission into South Australia's child protection system.



INFORMATION BOOKLET

A proposed Royal Commission for South Australia

What we seek. What it would examine.

Care should mean safety.

164

children harmed while in care

Abuse or neglect was substantiated for 164 children in 2024–25, representing 3.0% of children in out-of-home care or other supported placements. [1]

The recorded total fell from 231 the previous year.

304

children in sexual-harm notifications

171 notifications to the Guardian involved 304 children and young people in 2025–26; the previous year's new referrals involved 222. These are allegations, not proven abuse. [2, 3]

49

people charged with sexual offences

Government figures reported in July 2024 concerned alleged offences against children in State care between March 2022 and May 2024. Charges are not convictions. [4]

Different measures and periods; these figures must not be added together.
Sources: page 18. Definitions and context: page 19.

“I can’t sleep here because I’m scared to sleep.”

A young person quoted in the Guardian’s annual report 2025–26, page 43, describing life in residential care. [2]

52.5%

had a face-to-face meeting with their caseworker

The Department for Child Protection (DCP) reported this level of face-to-face contact for children and young people in care in the month ending 30 June 2026. [5]

If a child is frightened, who will know?

Children need trusted adults who see them, listen and act. The Commission should find out who knew a child was at risk, what action followed and whether that action kept the child safe.

Urgent risks must be addressed while the inquiry does its work.

What the public record shows.

Court convictions and official inquiries document harm to children and gaps in protection. These cases raise questions the proposed Commission should examine.

CRIMINAL CONVICTION / JANUARY 2026

Drugs supplied to children in care

A man was jailed after pleading guilty to six counts of administering a controlled substance to two teenagers living in residential care. [6]

CRIMINAL CONVICTION / FEBRUARY 2026

A child in care raped outside her placement

A man was jailed after admitting three rapes of a teenager in State care. The offending happened outside her placement. [7]

GUARDIAN INQUIRY / 2026

Leaving care without recorded caseworker visits

One young person left care after six months in supported independent living without a recorded face-to-face visit from their allocated DCP worker. [8]

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER / 2024

Children removed when support was possible

An inquiry found unnecessary removals of Aboriginal children where family-centred, culturally responsive support was possible. [9]

One inquiry. The whole system.

We call on the Premier to establish a Royal Commission into the Safety, Protection and Wellbeing of Children and Young People in South Australia's Child Protection System.

Its purpose: establish where protection failed, who was responsible and what must change.



Parliament House, Adelaide

Why a Royal Commission?

Who knew children were at risk? What action followed? Where did safeguards fail—and what must change?

South Australia already has oversight bodies. [10] The proposed Commission would examine decisions across DCP, care providers, police and oversight bodies in one independent inquiry.

A Royal Commission can require records and witnesses and hear evidence on oath. [11] It should test official accounts against records and direct evidence from children, young people, Carers, families and workers.

What would it examine?

The following 11 pages explain the proposed inquiry areas, one per page in numerical order.

Read the full proposed terms of reference

PROPOSED TERM 01

What happened to children in care?

Establish the extent and nature of alleged and substantiated sexual and physical abuse in care, and how this has changed since 2016.

Where, and by whom?

Examine residential, commercial, emergency and family-based care. Identify alleged perpetrators: staff, Carers, other children and young people, and others.

Which children?

Identify the age, gender, cultural background and disability status of children affected.

Who knew, and what followed?

Establish when and how abuse was identified, how long it continued and who raised it. Check investigations, police referrals, substantiation, charges, and how each child was protected and supported.



Find the harm.
Trace the response.



PROPOSED TERM 02

Safe care depends on daily practice.

Examine how the Department for Child Protection (DCP), non-government organisations and residential care providers protect children and respond to abuse.

Staffing and supervision

Examine staffing arrangements in residential care, including single-staffed shifts, how workers are supervised and whether these arrangements keep children safe.

Safe staffing. Clear supervision.

Understand the failures. Establish accountability.

Identify failures, wrongdoing or misconduct by DCP, agencies or other bodies that harmed children or put them at risk.

Organisational and workplace culture

Examine organisational and workplace culture and how it affected children's safety.

Information and action

How was information about children, risks and concerns recorded, shared, acted on or withheld?

Who was accountable?

Establish who was responsible for failures, wrongdoing or misconduct, and whether they were held accountable.

PROPOSED TERM 04

Who investigates abuse in care?

Clarify the respective roles of DCP and South Australia Police (SAPOL) in investigating abuse of children and young people in care.

Prompt police referrals

Are allegations referred to police promptly and consistently?

Independence from the Department

Is it appropriate for DCP to investigate abuse occurring in its own care?

Who should lead?

Should investigations be led by SAPOL or an independent specialist team, including joint investigation models used in other jurisdictions?

Distinguish criminal investigations from care-concern inquiries, and examine how they work together to protect children.



PROPOSED TERM 05

Safety includes belonging.

Examine the safety, protection and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in care, and their over-representation in the child protection system.

Family, culture and Country

Are cultural safety and connections to family, community, culture and Country maintained in practice?

A voice in decisions

Examine how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is applied, and the role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and communities in decisions about their children.



PROPOSED TERM 06

Care that meets children's needs.

Do children and young people in care receive the support they need to be healthy, learn, stay connected to culture and move into adulthood?

Health and wellbeing

Health, mental health, disability and therapeutic support.

Learning and culture

Education and the cultural support each child needs.

Into adulthood

The support young people need to move into adulthood.

Examine what children receive and whether it meets their needs.



PROPOSED TERM 07

Be heard.
Be protected.

A child needs a safe way to speak up—and a response that protects them.

Children and young people

Can children themselves disclose abuse or raise concerns safely and immediately, including outside their placement and DCP? Are the channels accessible, age-appropriate and known to them? Are concerns acted on without delay?

Staff

Can Department and residential care staff raise safety concerns and have them acted on? Can they report colleagues safely, confidentially and independently, without fear of retaliation?

Families and Carers

Can families and Carers report concerns and have them acted on?

Every concern needs a prompt, protective response.

PROPOSED TERM 08

Somewhere independent to turn.



Are complaints processes adequate, independent and able to correct decisions that put children at risk? Examine whether South Australia needs a new oversight body, separate from DCP, the Minister, existing statutory offices and funded bodies. [10]

Complaints with the power to act

An independent complaints and investigation mechanism with power to investigate concerns and correct decisions that put children at risk.

Reportable conduct

A scheme like New South Wales, requiring allegations of abuse or misconduct against staff to be reported to an independent body overseeing the response. [12]

Independent advocacy

An independent advocate for children, young people, families and Carers to help them be heard and seek a remedy.



PROPOSED TERM 09

Funding that keeps children safe.

Examine how resources are allocated and whether funding goes to what best keeps children safe.

$1.004bn

Total child protection spending

South Australia, 2024–25.
Real recurrent expenditure. [1]

Residential care

What is spent on residential care?

Support for Carers

How does that compare with support for Foster and Kinship Carers and informal kinship carers?

River Murray at Renmark

Did past reforms make children safer?

Examine whether past inquiry recommendations were implemented and whether reforms achieved their intended outcomes for children and young people.

Implementation and monitoring

Which recommendations were implemented, which were not, and why? Who monitored and reported progress?

Independent verification

Was reported progress independently verified through direct evidence from children and young people, Carers, parents, families and others with lived experience? Test the claims of DCP, government and funded bodies against that evidence.

Outcomes for children

Did reforms achieve their intended outcomes for children and young people?

Implementation must lead to better outcomes.



PROPOSED TERM 11

Every decision about home matters.

Examine whether removal, decisions to leave children at home, and reunification are safe and appropriate.

Unnecessary removal	Were children separated from their families when removal was not necessary?
Risk left unaddressed	Were children who needed to be removed instead left at risk?
Unsafe reunification	Were children returned home when it was unsafe, leading to serious harm or death?

Clear answers. Safer childhoods.

We are asking the Premier to take three clear steps.

Meet

Urgently meet Carers, families and advocates. Hear their concerns directly.

Establish

Establish an independent Royal Commission to examine the system and identify what must change.

Protect

Address urgent risks now. Make it safe to report concerns and support children while the inquiry works.

Read the full proposed terms of reference

saroyalcommission.com.au

RECURRING FAILURES NEED ANSWERS

Warnings must lead to protection.

Current concerns echo themes examined by the Mullighan Inquiry: sexual exploitation, barriers to disclosure and failures to protect children. These recurring themes warrant independent investigation. [13]

The campaign says it is receiving further accounts of harm and unmet needs. These accounts require careful, independent examination; they are not presented here as verified findings.

Recommendations must name who acts, set deadlines and provide for public reporting of independently verified progress.

The sources behind the case.

Select a source below to open it. The numbers match the bracketed references in this booklet.

1 / Report on Government Services 2026

Productivity Commission. Tables 16A.16 (harm) and 16A.10 (spending).

2 / Guardian annual report 2025–26

Pages 35–38: sexual-harm notifications. Page 43: young person's words.

3 / Guardian annual report 2024–25

Page 43: new referrals and children involved.

4 / ABC News, 11 July 2024

Government figures on 49 people charged.

5 / DCP annual report 2025–26

Face-to-face caseworker contact; deaths of children and young people.

6 / ABC News, 31 January 2026

Conviction for administering drugs to teenagers living in residential care.

7 / ABC News, 10 February 2026

Rape convictions involving a teenager in State care.

8 / Guardian inquiry, 2026

Supported Independent Living. Pages 39–40: contact and oversight.

9 / Aboriginal Children's Commissioner

Holding on to Our Future, 2024. Pages 18–19: unnecessary removals.

10 / Ombudsman SA

Existing child protection complaint jurisdiction.

11 / Royal Commissions Act 1917

Section 10: records, witnesses and evidence.

12 / NSW reportable conduct scheme

Office of the Children's Guardian: how it works.

13 / Mullighan Inquiry, 2008

Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry. Historical findings and accounts.

Evidence definitions and image credits: page 19. Sources checked November 2026.

A strong case must stand up to scrutiny.

Substantiated harm [1]

The 164 figure counts children whose abuse or neglect while in care was substantiated during 2024–25. It covers out-of-home care and other supported placements. Perpetrators can include anyone encountered during care. The total fell from 231 in 2023–24. SA's revised recording approach limits comparisons with earlier years.

Sexual-harm notifications [2, 3]

Notifications concern allegations and can include historical matters, risk of harm and harmful sexual behaviour between children. They do not measure proven abuse or incidence. The 222 comparison is the previous year's new referrals; additional carry-over matters were reported separately.

Charges and contact [4, 5]

The 49 figure is historical reporting from July 2024; charges are not convictions. The 52.5% contact figure relates only to June 2026. Neither establishes the outcome or experience of every child.

Spending and deaths [1, 5]

The $1.004bn figure is total recurrent child protection spending, in 2024–25 dollars; it is not a measure of waste. DCP reports three children in care died from medical conditions in 2025–26 and 23 children with prior departmental contact died. Those figures do not establish that the system caused their deaths.

Cases and historical comparisons [6–9, 13]

The drug conviction does not establish covert drugging or sexual assault. Individual cases do not measure the prevalence of harm. Historical and current figures cover different groups and periods; they do not establish that harm today is on the same scale as in the Mullighan evidence.

About this booklet

This information booklet summarises 11 proposed inquiry areas. They are questions for investigation, not findings about individual cases. Existing statutory oversight operates; the proposal asks whether stronger, separate oversight is needed. [10]

Imagery and credits

AI photographic illustrations on pages 1, 6–7, 10–13 and 16 show fictional people and situations in South Australian-inspired settings, not actual cases or the quoted child.

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