

About Child Welfare

Institutions established for the care of children between 1920 and 1990 were managed privately, by charitable or religious organisations, or by governments.

Children entering care included orphans, [Former Child Migrants](#), [State Wards](#) and [Stolen Generations](#). People also encountered the welfare system through the practice of [adoption, including forced adoption](#), [disability](#), and poverty.

Over time, welfare standards changed from charging children with the crime of being neglected and placing them in large institutions, to smaller group homes that functioned separately to the criminal justice system and attempted to provide a closer semblance to family life.

Types of Institutions:

Orphanages

These institutions usually offered dormitory style accommodation for children. Often the children who lived in orphanages had parents or relatives but could not live with their families for a variety of reasons, including poverty.

Disability Homes

It was common for children with disabilities to be [placed into children's institutions](#).

The response of children in care to abuse and neglect could see them labelled as 'feeble-minded' or 'mentally defective', in which case they could be moved into disability homes. Some children also developed disabilities as a result of their (often abusive) time in care.

The Senate's "Forgotten Australians" 2004 report pointed out that many children removed from their homes were inappropriately accommodated, not only in disability homes, but also in mental health institutions (for adults and children) and adult prisons.

Babies Homes

Home to children under three years of age, these institutions were known as infant asylums or foundling hospitals in the nineteenth century. Staff in babies' homes were usually trained nurses, and some institutions also provided training for mothercraft nurses.

[Babies Homes](#) were usually associated with services for single mothers, and often functioned (officially or not) as adoption agencies.

Maternity Hospitals

[These institutions](#) provided residential accommodation to pregnant women, usually single women, and often functioned (officially or not) as adoption agencies.