

2.1

The Children in Care Population

Numbers and distribution

In October 2005, there were 9,080 children in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). As shown in Figure 1, this accounted for approximately 1% of all children in the province under the age of 19 – 0.5% of non-Aboriginal children and almost 7% of all Aboriginal children in the province (2001 census data). This means that Aboriginal children were many more times likely to be in care than non-Aboriginal children were.

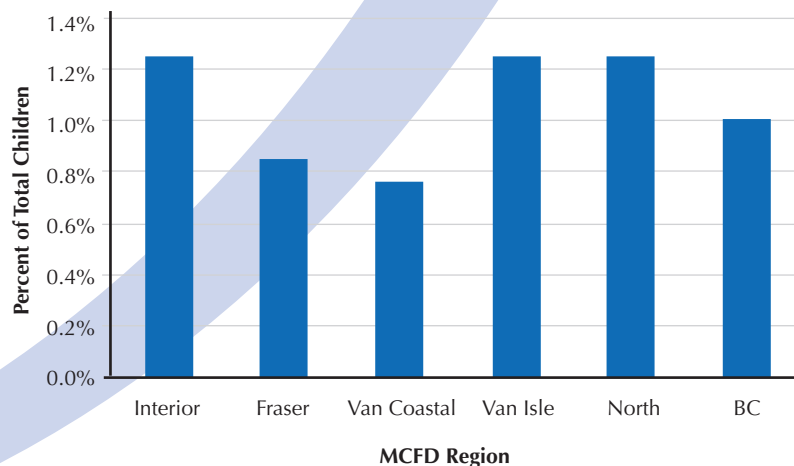
The percentage of the child population in care varied significantly across the Ministry of Children and Family Development regions, from 0.7% in Vancouver Coastal to 1.3% in the Interior and Vancouver Island regions. The percentage of children in care in October 2005 was consistent with the average percentage of children who were in care in the study population between 1997 and 2005.

The 9,080 children in care were geographically distributed across the Ministry of Children and Family Development regions, as shown in Figure 2, with a range of 32% of children in care living in the Fraser region to 11% living in the North region.

In October 2005, there were 9080 children in care, accounting for approximately 1% of all children in British Columbia. Of the total children in care, 49% were Aboriginal children, even though Aboriginal children constitute only 7% of the general population of children in the province.

Figure 1

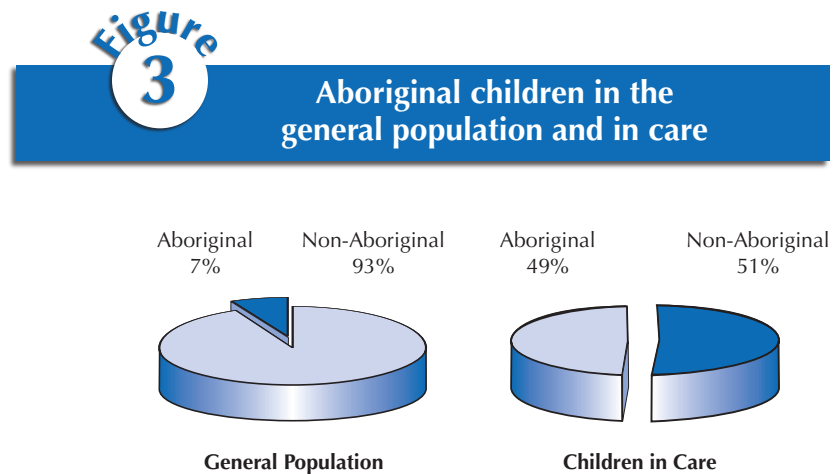
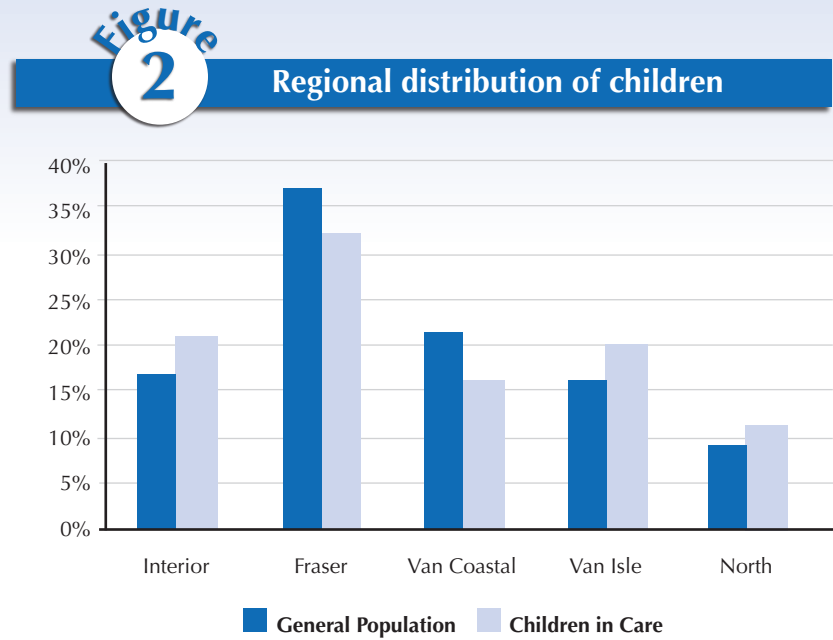
Children in care by MCFD region¹



¹ Except for the use of 2001 census data for the general population numbers or as otherwise noted, all data in section 2.1 are from October 2005.

For comparison, Figure 2 also shows the geographic distribution for all children in the province. The Interior, Vancouver Island and the North all had more children in care in proportion to their geographic population of children, whereas the Fraser and Vancouver Coastal region had fewer.

The number of Aboriginal children in care was significantly disproportionate to the number of Aboriginal children in the general population. In 1997, Aboriginal children accounted for 31% of children in care. By 2005, Aboriginal children accounted for 49% of children in care, although they constituted only 7% of the general population.² Underlying the increase in the rate of Aboriginal children in care are two factors: the number of non-Aboriginal children in care decreased from 6,309 to 4,655 and the number of Aboriginal children in care increased from 2,901 to 4,425.



This report uses the same definition of Aboriginal as the Ministry of Children and Family Development uses in its data.

² The 7% figure is based on 2001 census data. Population projections for 2006 suggest that almost 9% of children in the general population in the province is of Aboriginal descent.

Figure 4 shows that there was considerable regional variation in the percentage of children in care who were Aboriginal, ranging from 77% in the North down to 37% in the Fraser. The fact that there was a higher proportion of Aboriginal children in care in the North region is likely a reflection of the fact that Aboriginal people make up a higher proportion of the population of the region, although the rate in the North remains disproportionately high.

Care status

Children come into the care of the government through various types of agreements and court orders. Figure 5 shows that 60% of the children who were in care were in continuing care. Forty per cent of the children in care were in temporary care.

Figure
4

Proportion of children in care by Aboriginal status

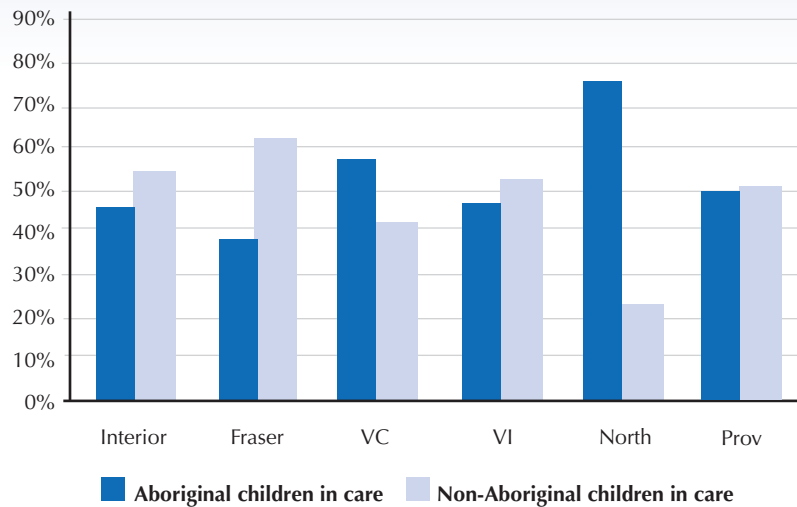
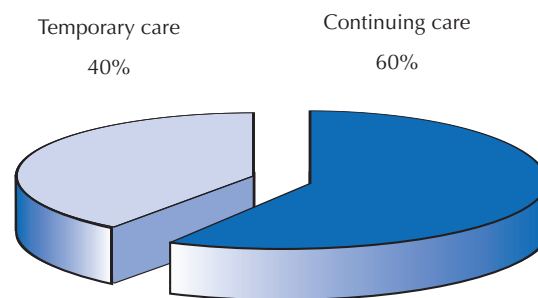


Figure
5

Children in care by care status



The single largest group of children in care was Aboriginal children in continuing care (Figure 6).

Figure 7 shows the percentage of Aboriginal children in care by care status and by region. Provincially, 66% of Aboriginal children in care were in continuing care – which compares with an overall rate of 54% of non-Aboriginal children.

Although the North region had the highest percentage of Aboriginal children in care, it had the lowest percentage of Aboriginal children who were in continuing care, at 61%. The highest percentage of Aboriginal children in continuing care was in the Vancouver Coastal region, where 75% of all Aboriginal children in care were in continuing care. In the study population (1997–2005), 40% of Aboriginal children in care were in continuing care and 30% of non-Aboriginal children in care were in continuing care.

Figure 6 Children in care by Aboriginal status and care status

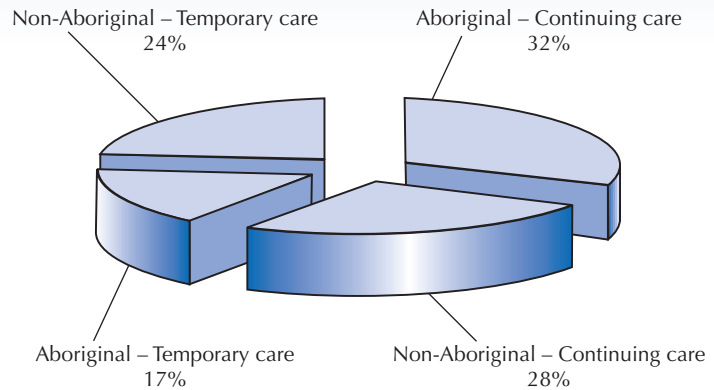
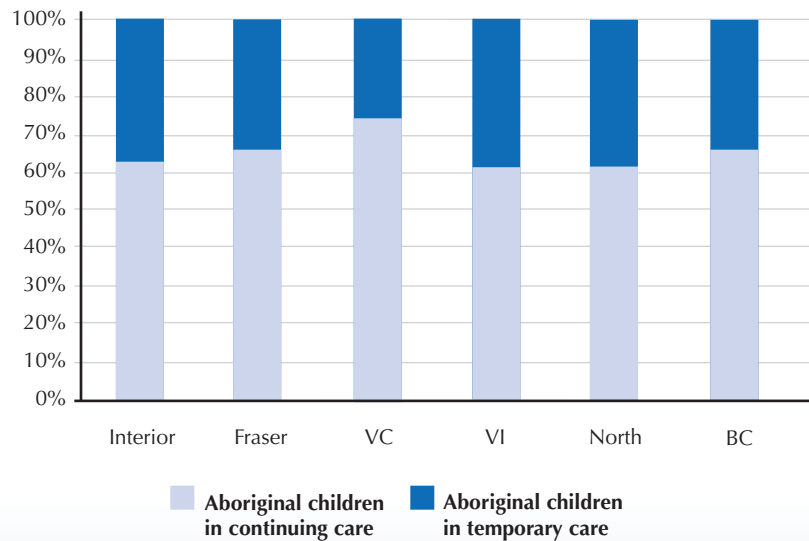


Figure 7 Aboriginal children in care by care status



Age of children in care

The average age of children in temporary care was lower than for children in continuing care, which is not surprising, given that most children in continuing care would have been in temporary care first (Figure 8).

The average age of Aboriginal children was lower than that of non-Aboriginal children (Figure 9). This is consistent with the study population (1997–2005). One implication of Aboriginal children being younger than non-Aboriginal children is that those in continuing care will likely be in care longer and will constitute a higher percentage of children in continuing care in the future.

Males made up just over half (52%) of children in care. The average age of children in care was the same for males and females.

Figure 8

Age distribution of children in care by care status

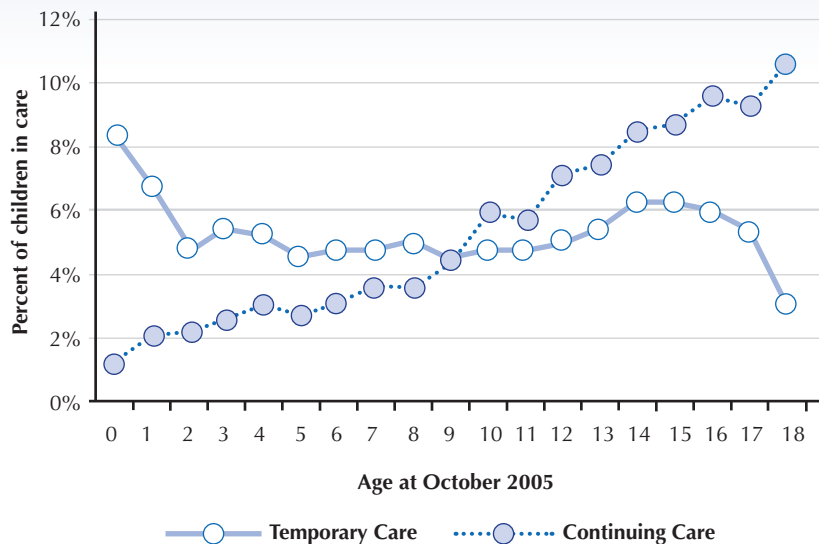
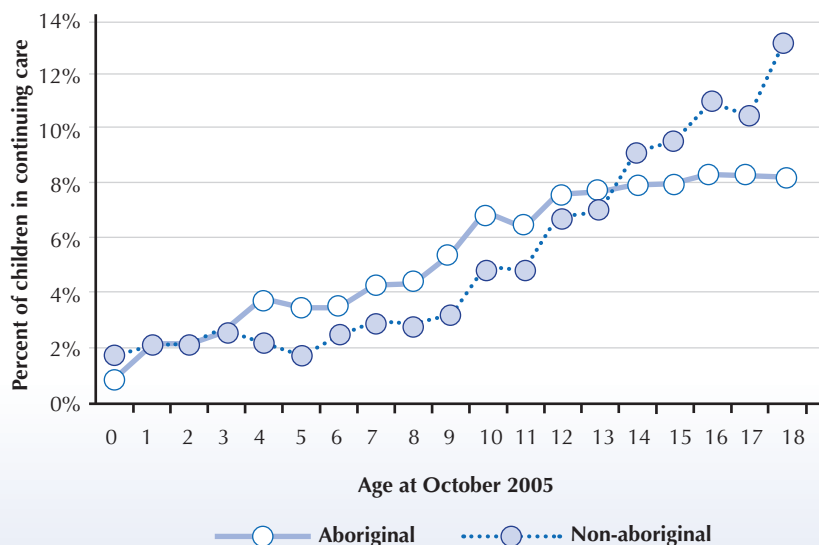


Figure 9

Age distribution of children in care by Aboriginal status



Differences between October 2005 and the 1997–2005 descriptions

The October 2005 description of children in care looks quite different from the study population (1997–2005). In the study population, 33% had been or were in continuing care, versus 67% in temporary care. Thirty-four per cent of the study population was Aboriginal and 66% was non-Aboriginal. The primary reason for this difference is that the October 2005 population of children in care was taken from a month-end census and the study population is a cumulative total.³

³Month-end census versus cumulative totals: On any given day, if the number of children in care are counted, about 60% of them are in continuing care and 40% are in temporary care. But if the number of children in care are counted over several months or years, the children in temporary care change far more frequently than the children in continuing care. This means that over time a greater number of different children will have been in care on a temporary basis than children who are in care on a continuing basis.