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Canada

UNECE/UNICEF Expert Meeting on Statistics on Children

Rates of out-of-home care among children in Canada: An analysis of national administrative child welfare data

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How many children are in out-of-home care in Canada?

Estimates of the number of children in out-of-home care in Canada

Analysis of public data from government departments¹

(Age of protection in each province/territory; Children in care on March 31; some missing data on kinship)

2019

59,283

Prevalence

(Existing placements)

Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse & Neglect²

(Children aged 0-15; Placement following a new investigation)

2019

15,701

Incidence

(New placements)

National Population Census³

(Children aged 0-14; foster children; point-in time)

2021

26,680

Prevalence

(Existing placements)

Canadian Child Welfare Information System⁴

(Children aged 0-17+; all placement types; March 31, 2022)

2022

?

Prevalence

(Existing placements)

Canadian Child Welfare Information System



Aggregate and record-level data about children and youth aged 0-17+ in out-of-home care in Canada



Point-in-time counts on March 31, 2022



Out-of-home care = Alternative care



Collaboration with child welfare sector partners

Analysis

Percentage (% of all children in out-of-home care)

To describe the characteristics of children in out-of-home care.

Rate (per 1,000 population)

To estimate the prevalence of out-of-home care among children.

Rate Ratio (X times higher)

To compare rates of out-of-home care among different groups.

As available, analyze data by:

- Sex/gender
- Age group
- Province/territory
- Year
- Placement type



Sensitivity
analysis with
public
ISC data



Results

How many children are in out-of-home care in Canada?

61,104

Children in out-of-home care in Canada
on March 31, 2022

Note: Data from Prince Edward Island is based on a total count for the 2020/2021 fiscal year, not a March 31 point-in-time count..

Percentage of children in out-of-home care by sex/gender, 2021/2022

61,104
Children in out-of-home care in Canada
on March 31, 2022

Sex/gender data from
6 provinces/territories*

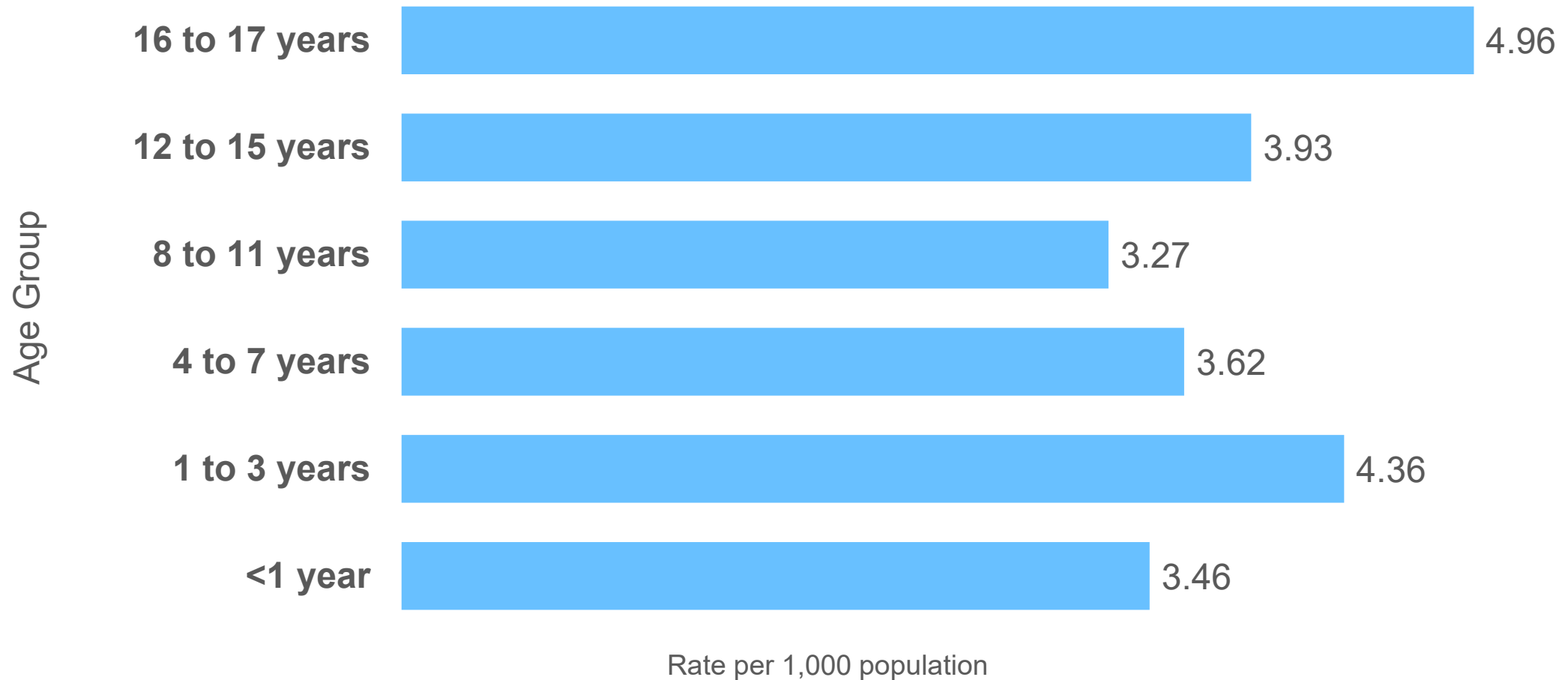
11,489

Children in out-of-home care in Canada
on March 31, 2022



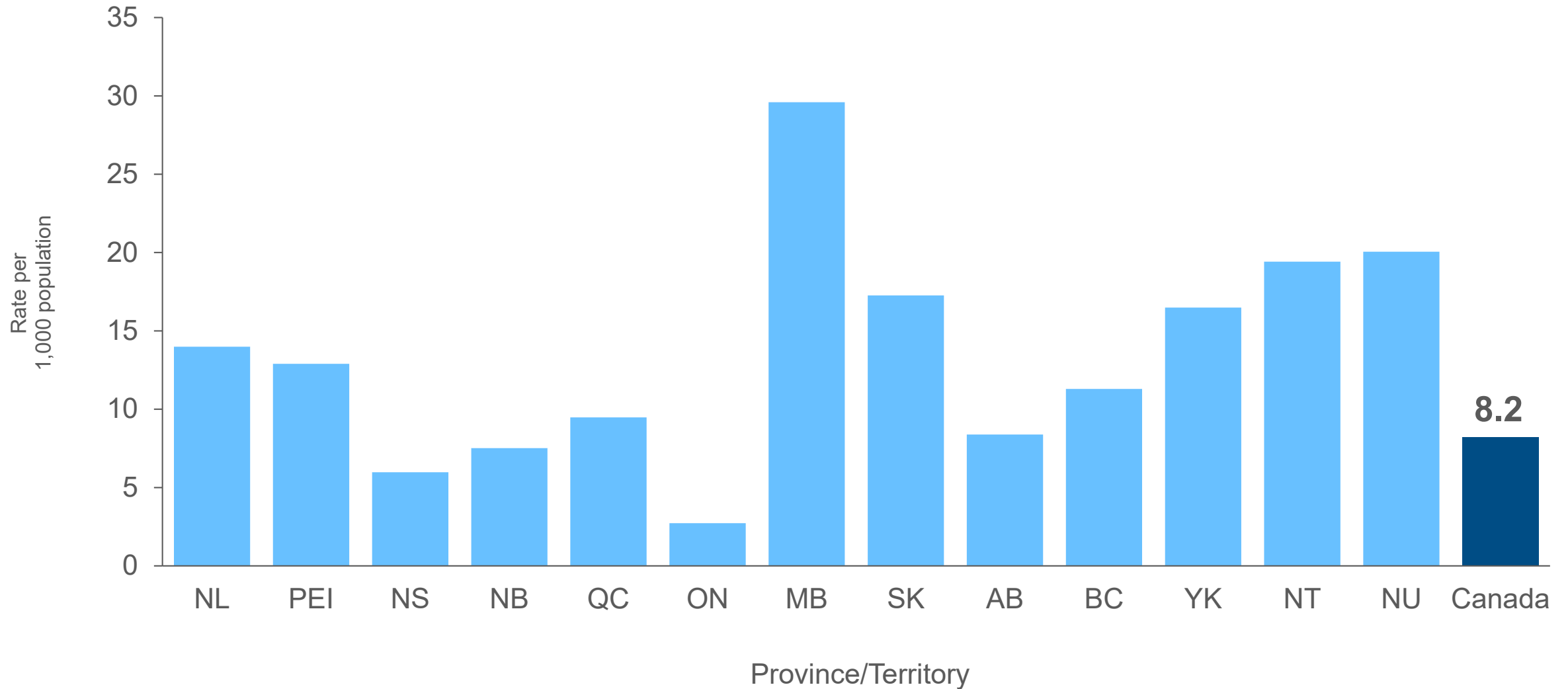
Notes: *Based on data from 6 provinces and territories (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Alberta, Northwest Territories and Nunavut), covering 18.8% of children in out-of-home care on March 31, 2022.

Rates of out-of-home care by age group, 2021/2022



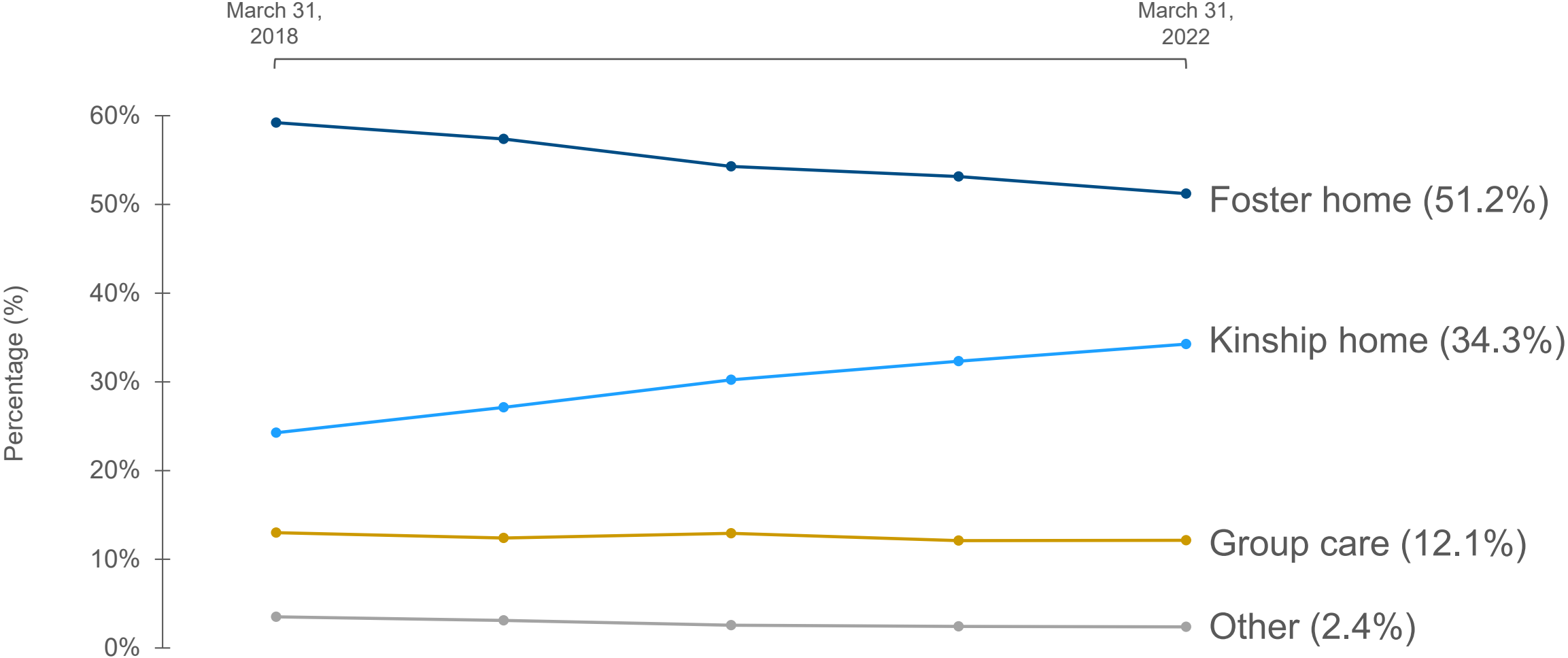
Notes: Based on data from 6 provinces and territories (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Alberta and Northwest Territories), covering 26.3% of children in out-of-home care in 2021/2022. Age-stratified data from Ontario included children aged 0-17 years who were *in care* and in *customary care*. The rate for 18 to 21 years (25 years in Yukon) was 0.7 per 1,000. Data not shown because three provinces and territories (Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta, Ontario) were excluded from the analysis due to missing (i.e. age span did not include 18+ years) or suppressed counts).

Rates of out-of-home care in Canada by province/territory, 2021/2022



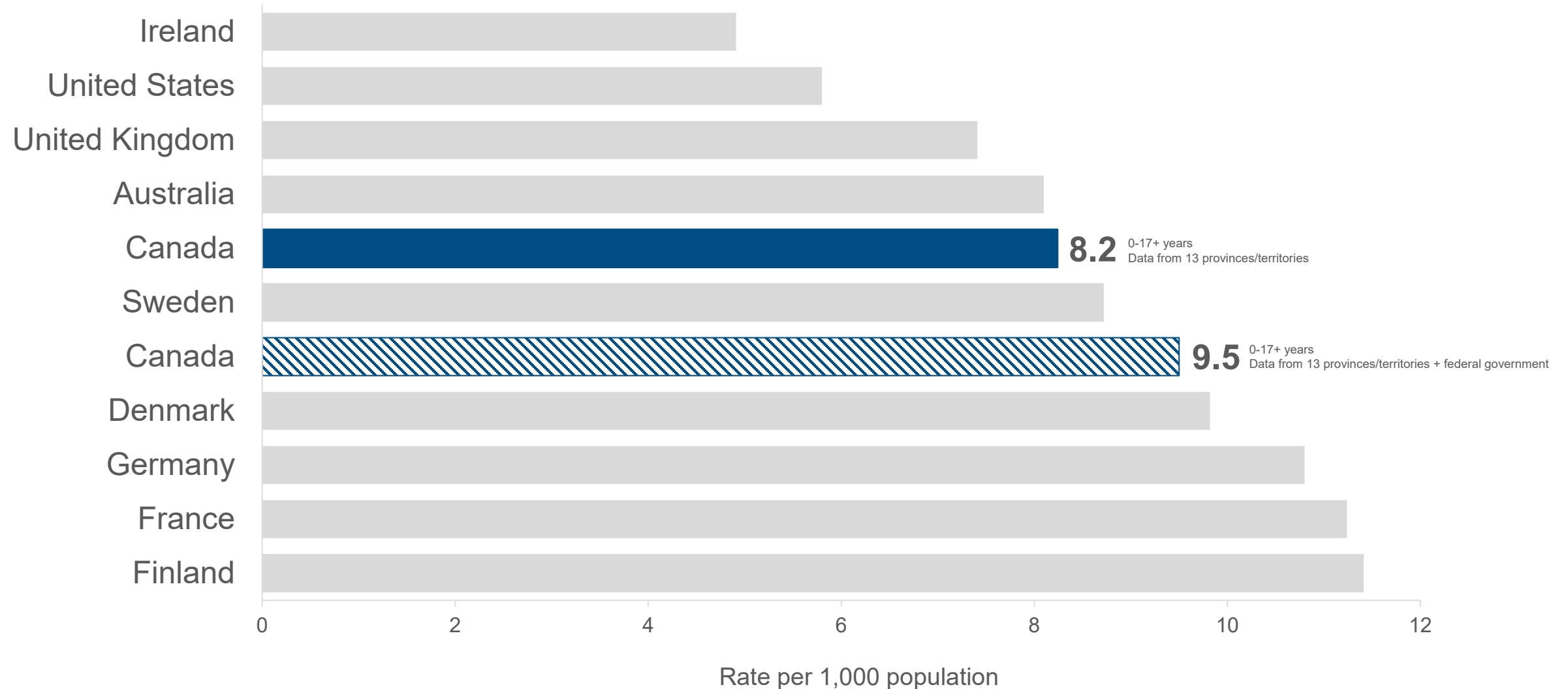
Notes: Data for the 2021/2022 fiscal year from Prince Edward Island were not available so count data from the most recent year (2020/2021) were used as proxy. Rates are based on data from 13 provinces/territories; data from Indigenous Services Canada were not included.

Percentage of children in out-of-home care by placement type in Canada



Notes: Based on point-in-time count data from 9 provinces/territories with available data, stratified by placement type, over the 5-year period: Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. ISC data not included for any year or jurisdiction.

Rates of children aged 0-17 in alternative care by country



Notes: Canadian rate estimate of 8.2 per 1,000 based on data for children aged 0-17 (up to age 20, 21, and 25 in some jurisdictions) from all 13 provinces and territories but excluding data from 50 Indigenous child welfare agencies in 4 provinces; Canadian rate estimate of 9.5 based on data for children aged 0-21 from all 13 provinces and territories and Indigenous Services Canada; other rate estimates from Eurochild (2020/2021),⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018/2019),⁶ and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019/2020).⁷

Strengths and challenges with national data in Canada

Strengths

- Working conceptual definition
- Near complete national coverage
- Stratified data are feasible
- Placement types are comparable
- March 31 point-in-time count is common
- Multiple types of data can be combined
- Aggregate data mitigates privacy risks

Challenges

- Unclear definitions in some regions
- Gaps in coverage by year and local areas
- Limited data on gender and age
- Varied approaches to kinship and youth data
- Underestimate of temporary placements
- Possible double-counting
- No data on Indigeneity, race or ethnicity

Future work

- Refine the definition of out-of-home care
- Increase use of record-level data
- Expand coverage:
 - + Geography
 - + Years
 - + Sex/gender and age
 - + Informal, youth, and adoption placements
 - + Specific placement types
- Establish a data governance plan
- Formalize data sharing
- Add new indicators:
 - + Reason for placement
 - + Entry and exit
 - + Placement duration



Summary

- An estimated 61,104 children were in out-of-home care on March 31st, 2022.
- The rate of out-of-home care in Canada was 8.2 per 1,000.
- Rates of out-of-home care varied by jurisdiction.
- Rates were highest among males and children aged 1-3 and 16-17 years.
- Most children in out-of-home care (>84%) were in family-based care.

Thank you. Questions?

Contact Us

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Read the report

Pollock, N. J., Ouédraogo, A. M., Trocmé, N., Hovdestad, W., Miskie, A., Crompton, L., Campeau, A., Tanaka, M., Zhang, C., Laprise, C., & Tonmyr, L. (2024). Rates of out-of-home care among children in Canada: An analysis of national administrative child welfare data. *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada: Research, Policy and Practice*, 44(4).

<https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.44.4.02>

References

1. Saint-Girons M, Trocmé N, Esposito T, Fallon B. Children in out-of-home care in Canada in 2019 [Internet]. Montréal (QC): Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal; 2020 [cited 2023 Jun 22]. Available from: <https://cwrp.ca/publications/children-out-home-care-canada-2019>
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7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Child protection Australia 2019–20 [Internet]. Canberra (AU): Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; 2021 [cited 2021 Sep 19]. Available from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c3b0e267-bd63-4b91-9ea6-9fa4d14c688c/aihw-cws-78.pdf.aspx?inline=true>



Additional Slides

Data coverage for the Canadian Child Welfare Information System

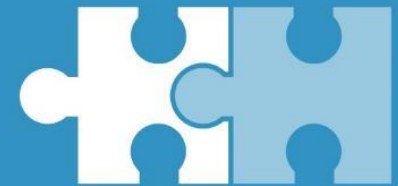
Jurisdiction or department	Source Type	Most recent year used	# of years	Date of count	Age span of coverage	Sex/Gender + Age Group	Placement Type
Newfoundland and Labrador	Custom	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–21	Yes	Yes
Prince Edward Island	Public	2020/2021	4	Total fiscal year	0–17	No	No
Nova Scotia	Custom	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–20	Yes	Yes
New Brunswick	Custom	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–18	Yes	Yes
Quebec	Public	2021/2022	5	Point in time (March 31)	0–17	No	Yes
Ontario	Custom	2021/2022	3	Point in time (March 31)	0–17	Partial	Yes
Manitoba	Public	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–17	No	Yes
Saskatchewan	Public	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–21	No	No
Alberta	Custom	2021/2022	9	Monthly point in time average	0–17	Yes	Yes
British Columbia	Public and custom	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–18	No	No
Yukon	Public	2021/2022	5	Point in time (September 30)	0–25	No	Yes
Northwest Territories	Record-level	2021/2022	5	Point in time (March 31)	0–18	Yes	Yes
Nunavut	Public	2021/2022	9	Point in time (March 31)	0–18	Partial	Yes
Indigenous Services Canada	Public	2019/2020	1	Point in time (March 31)	0–17	No	No

Table 2. Placement type definitions in CCWIS data

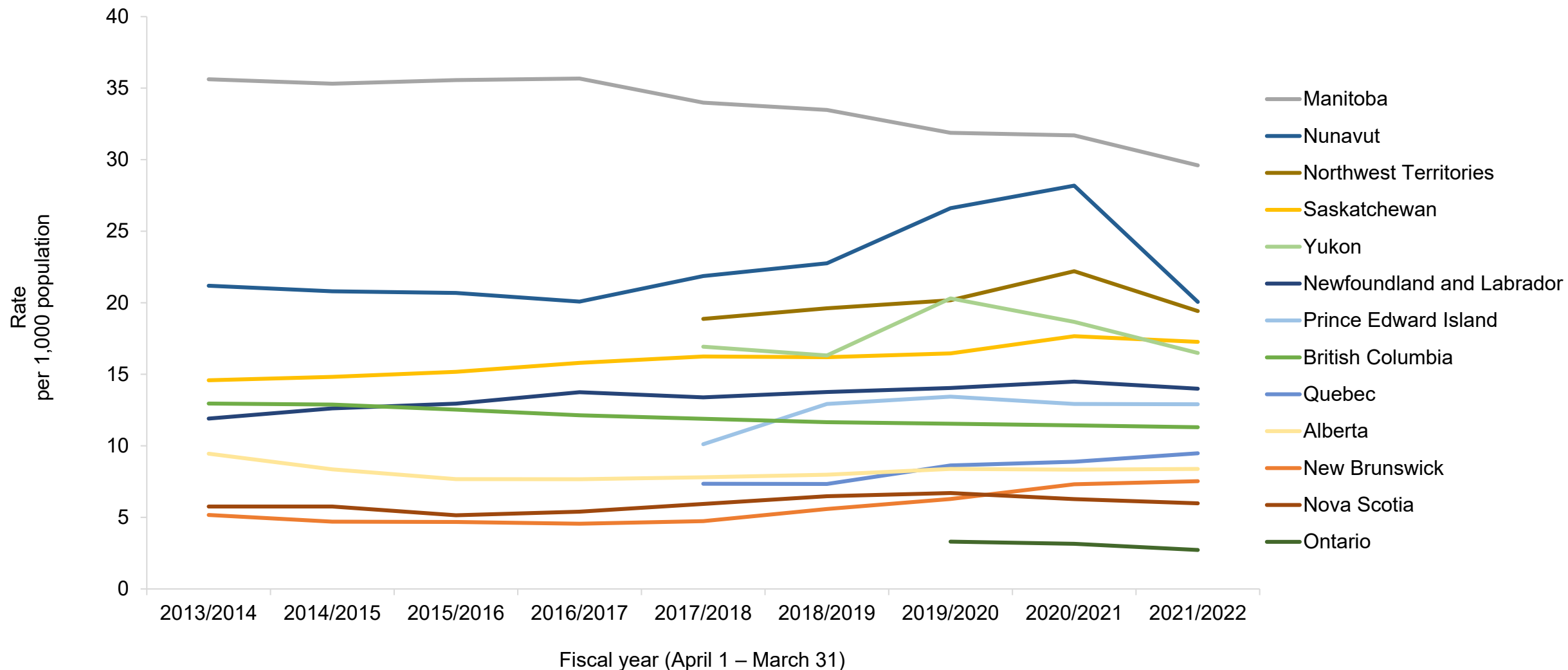
Placement type	Definition	Examples of placement types included	Special considerations
Kinship home	A kinship home is a type of family-based care with a caregiver who has a family relationship or other close tie or attachment to the child, their family, or the child's cultural community. Informal kinship placements variously include children whose legal status has not changed (i.e. parents/guardians maintain legal custody), but the child is placed with an extended family member or a trusted community member (as in customary care) on an emergency or temporary basis under voluntary conditions or by court order. Formal kinship placements typically involve extended family homes and caregivers who have gone through a formal review, training and approval process that is similar to the process foster homes undergo. Both informal and formal kinship and extended family placements are classified in CCWIS data as kinship homes.	Person of sufficient interest Kinship out-of-care by court order or agreement Customary care Extended family care Kinship service or placement Provisional home Relative foster home Place of safety	Some jurisdictions, e.g. Saskatchewan, do not use the term kinship in any form (kinship care, kinship home, kinship service, etc.) when referring to any placement type. In some jurisdictions, kinship placements are formal placements that involve a change in the child's legal custody status, whereas placement with extended family does not. Customary care is a placement type that is specific to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. It typically involves a voluntary placement in or close to a home community with extended family or other community member. The purpose of customary care is to support a child's connection to their culture and language.
Foster home	A foster home is another type of family-based care. This type of care typically involves one or two primary caregivers who are not related to the child (i.e. non-family members). Except in some specific arrangements with agency-based, contracted or treatment foster homes, caregivers and children live in a private home. Foster homes are a formal placement and prospective foster parents/caregivers undergo a screening, training and approval or licensing process. Caregivers are not typically paid a salary but receive financial support to cover the living costs for each child placed in their home.	Foster home Treatment foster home Parent-model, agency-based, or contracted foster home Specialized foster home	Some jurisdictions, e.g. Yukon, no longer use the terms foster home or foster care, but are using community caregiver home instead.
Group care	Group care comprises two main subtypes: group home and treatment facility. A group home is often a large house with multiple children, where the caregivers are paid staff, e.g. child and youth workers. Group homes may be operated by the child welfare authority; a contracted resource such as a not-for-profit, charitable or religious organization; or by a for-profit business. A treatment facility refers to any placement in a specialized, often secure, institutional or congregate setting, e.g. a campus-based treatment centre or hospital, that provides access to therapeutic supports and interventions for behavioural, social, developmental, mental health, substance use or physical health conditions or issues.	Group home Residential care Treatment centre Secure treatment Hospital	n/a
Other	Children may be placed in other settings, usually on a temporary or transitional basis. This small subset of placements are most often used to address extenuating circumstances such as limited local access to specialized services or limitations in the availability of approved out-of-home care settings.	Out-of-province/territory Semi-independent living Hotel/motel Shelter Adoption probation	In some jurisdictions, data on placement types such as independent and semi-independent living, out-of-province/territory placements and adoption probation were not included or were not disaggregated. In the Northwest Territories, out-of-territory placements were not distinguished from in-territory placements, and so were only included in "other" if the placed child was not in a form of family or group care.

Methods

- Aggregate data (99.6%) and de-identified record-level data (0.4%)
 - Missing data from ~50 First Nations agencies in four provinces (NB, ON, SK, and QC)
- Sensitivity analysis with public data from Indigenous Services Canada
- Sex/gender data covers 6 provinces/territories
- Age group data for 6 provinces/territories
- Placement type data for 10 provinces/territories



Rates of out-of-home care by year and province/territory, 2013/14 – 2021/22

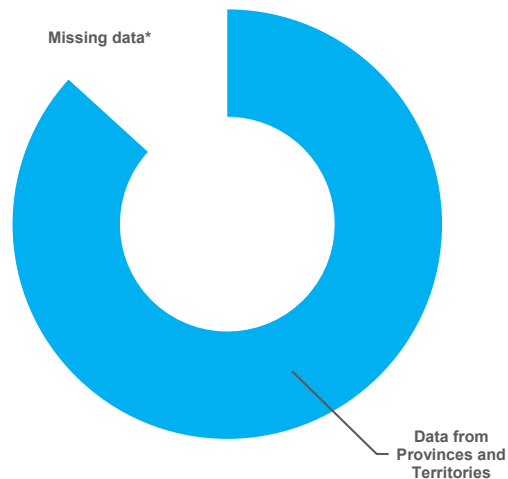


Notes: Numerator in rate calculations is based on a 31 March point-in-time count. Prince Edward Island data for 2021/2022 were missing; 2020/2021 data were used for the rate calculation. Nunavut kinship data for 2017/2018 were used for the rate calculation in 2018/2019. ISC data not included for any year or jurisdiction.

Sensitivity analysis with data from Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)

61,104

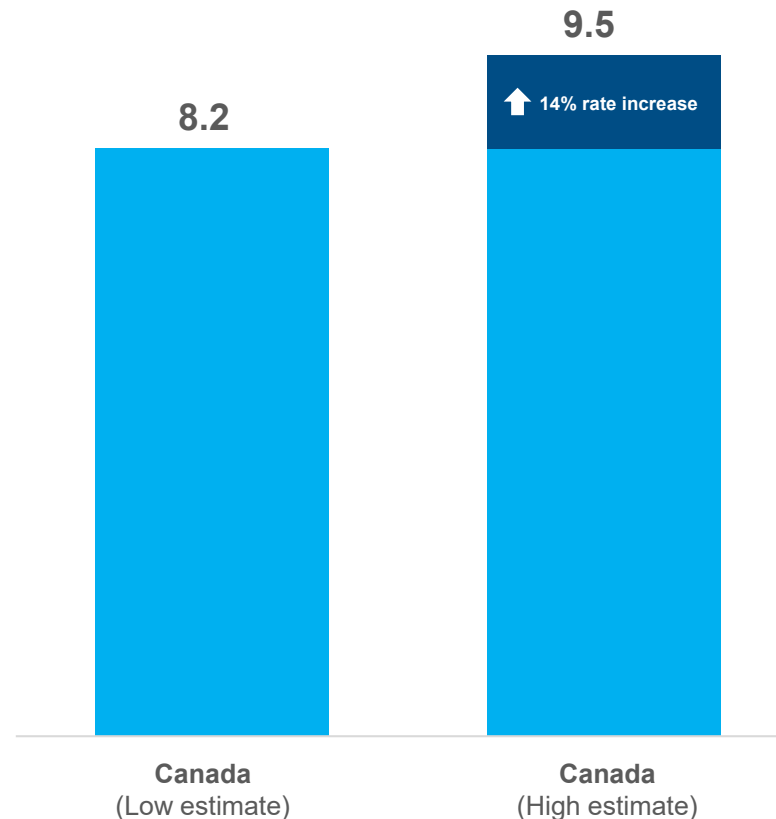
Children in out-of-home care
on March 31, 2022
(Data from 13 Provinces/Territories)



Notes: *Missing data from First Nations agencies in New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Quebec.

Interpretation Tip:

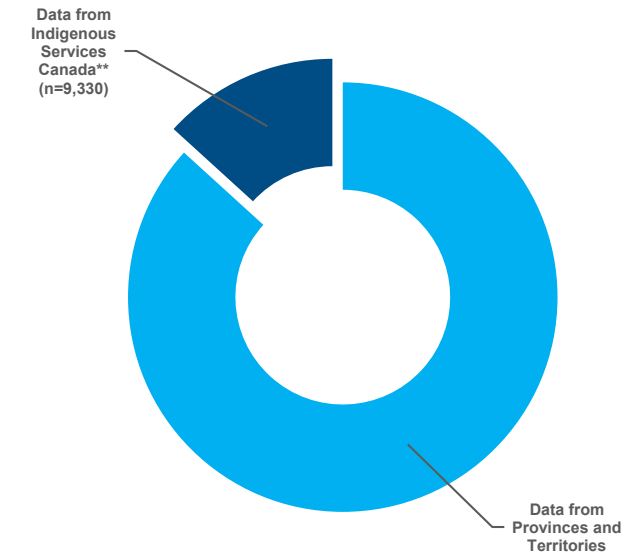
This *sensitivity analysis* estimates a maximum national rate by including ISC data to account for data gaps in four provinces.



Rate per 1,000 population

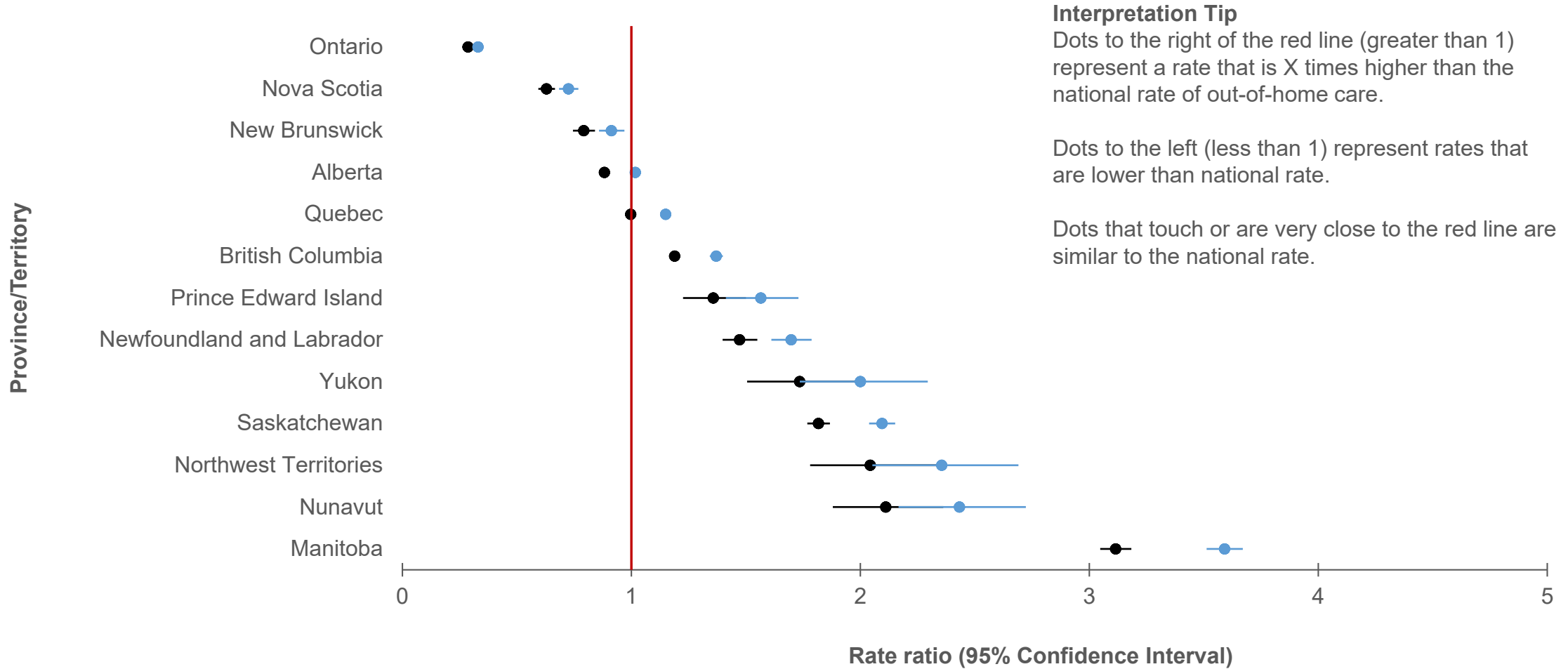
70,434

Children in out-of-home care
on March 31, 2022
(Data from 13 Provinces/Territories +
Indigenous Services Canada)



Notes: **ISC data was derived from a publicly reported count of children in out-of-home care on March 31, 2020. Some children counted in ISC data were also likely counted in data from provinces and territories.

Rate ratio of children in out-of-home care, by province/territory, Canada, 2021/2022



Reference group:

- National rate (data from 13 provinces/territories and Indigenous Services Canada)
- National rate (data from 13 provinces/territories)

Next steps

The Canadian Child Welfare Information System can be an evidence hub.

COLLABORATE

- Support partnerships with Provincial, Territorial, Indigenous, and delegated child welfare departments and agencies
- Collaborate with federal departments
- Design models for data governance
- Harmonize definitions and indicators
- Develop a minimum dataset
- Validate data and seek feedback on interpretation
- Answer priority research questions

ANALYZE



Epidemiology

- Track indicators across time, place, and populations



Research

- Investigate upstream risk & protective factors
- Assess the impact of policy changes

SHARE



Indicator Framework



Annual Reports



Data Dashboard



Peer-reviewed articles



Media Requests



Data Access for Research