

**Embargoed until 5:00pm 8 May 2013**

## **Report of the deaths of people with disabilities in care**

The NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, tabled a report to Parliament today on the deaths in 2010 and 2011 of 220 people with disabilities who lived in care.

The Ombudsman is required to review the deaths of children and adults who lived in the care of disability services and licensed boarding houses. Of these 220 people:

- 97 lived in accommodation operated by Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC)
- 98 lived in non-government accommodation funded by ADHC, and
- 25 lived in licensed boarding houses.

The Ombudsman's reviews have found that people with disabilities in care die at a much younger age than the general population. In 2010 and 2011, the average age at death of people in state funded disability accommodation services was 30 years younger than the general population. The average age at death of people in licensed boarding houses was 16 years younger than the general population.

**'Our reviews point to the need for a strong, continuing commitment to improve the health outcomes of people with disabilities in care, and to reduce preventable deaths,'** said Mr Barbour.

The Ombudsman reports that his reviews continue to identify deaths that were preventable, including deaths where risks had been, or could reasonably have been foreseen, but inadequate action had been taken in response. This includes risks related to choking, traffic awareness, smoking and obesity.

**'We have found that health and disability services do not always recognise the serious health and safety risks faced by people with disabilities in care'** Mr Barbour said. **'In 2010 and 2011, this included staff not recognising when people had become critically ill and required urgent medical assistance.'**

The Ombudsman's reviews of deaths have found that concerted and joint action is required by health and disability services to support people with disabilities to:

- address lifestyle-related health risks such as obesity, poor diet, and insufficient physical activity
- quit smoking (particularly people in licensed boarding houses)
- minimise resistance to health procedures and medical treatment, to ensure that they receive critical and timely treatment, and
- obtain adequate and effective support in hospital.

**'I am pleased to note the positive work that is now underway to improve outcomes for people with disabilities, including legislative reform of the boarding house sector, and pilots of multidisciplinary health services,'** said Mr Barbour.

**'Our reviews emphasise the vital need for this work to progress, and for disability services, health services and General Practitioners to work together to help people with disabilities to reduce key health risks that are associated with preventable deaths.'**

**'To assist, we have developed a range of factsheets on the important findings from our work and the steps support workers and GPs should take to help people with disabilities to improve their health and prevent avoidable deaths,'** Mr Barbour said.

The Ombudsman's factsheets will be forwarded to all relevant agencies and health networks, and made publicly available on the office's website. **'We are taking a proactive approach to ensure that the best information gets to the people who can directly influence health outcomes,'** said Mr Barbour. **'It is vital that we see these key messages being delivered at the 'coal-face', providing better support for people with disabilities.'**

The Ombudsman has made 18 recommendations, directed to ADHC, Health, and the Department of Education and Communities.