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**Embargoed until 12:30pm 29 June 2015**

## NSW Ombudsman

### **Report of Reviewable Child Deaths in 2012 and 2013**

The Ombudsman today tabled a biennial report to Parliament concerning his review of the deaths of 41 children in 2012 and 2013, and a separate review of 83 children who were killed in circumstances of familial abuse over the 10 year period to 2013. The report's 14 recommendations are directed jointly or separately to Family and Community Services, NSW Police Force, and NSW Health.

NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour is recommending that police and child protection staff work more closely together to improve responses to children living with domestic violence.

**“Our child death review work has shown there is a clear link between familial fatal abuse of children and perpetrators who were already known to police as serious violent offenders”** the Ombudsman said.

The report demonstrates the need for NSW Police Force and Family and Community Services to strengthen collaboration on high risk cases, including better and swifter exchange of information from the police and child protection databases.

**“The majority – almost 80 per cent - of children who died in abuse-related circumstances over the past decade in NSW were killed or allegedly killed by a family member.”** Mr Barbour said. **“Over half of the persons of interest in the child’s death were birth parents. Notably, intimate partners of birth mothers, particularly new male partners, also featured as persons of interest in one-third of the cases.”**

Well over half of the persons of interest were known to police as perpetrators of domestic and other violence. Most strikingly, the majority of those with a history of violence were known to police as serious violent offenders.

Mr Barbour **said “this illustrates why police holdings may be a valuable source of information for identifying particularly vulnerable or at-risk children.”**

While the deaths considered in the report occurred in 2012 and 2013, the Ombudsman said his report takes account of recent reforms to the child protection system.

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Media notes

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## Report of Reviewable Child Deaths in 2012 and 2013

The Ombudsman is required to review the deaths of children that occur as a result of abuse or neglect, or in suspicious circumstances, or while the children were in care.

For 2012-2013, the Ombudsman reviewed the deaths of 41 children:

- Nine children died as a result of abuse or in circumstances suspicious of abuse.
- Eighteen children died in circumstances of neglect or suspicious of neglect.
- Fourteen children died while in care; all of whom were in statutory out-of-home care.

The deaths of the 41 children represented 3.8 per cent of all deaths of children (1,067) in NSW in the two-year period.

### Familial abuse-related deaths in NSW 2004-2013 (a ten-year review)

In 2004-2013, 83 children from 75 families died in abuse-related circumstances in which the person or persons of interest was a family member:

- Three quarters of the children were aged five years or less.
- Two-thirds (50) of the 75 families had experienced separation or family breakdown prior to the child's death.
- Police identified 94 persons as responsible for, or persons of interest in, the deaths of the 83 children.
- The persons of interest included birth parents (36 mothers and 21 fathers) and intimate partners of birth parents (31 male, 1 female).
- Of intimate partners, most male partners (27) were new to the family and had formed a relationship with the birth partner less than a year before the child's death.
- 51 children died as a result of inflicted or allegedly inflicted injuries. Post-mortem examinations for 12 children revealed injuries that suggested physical abuse before the fatal event.
- 15 children died in murder-suicide incidents. Common factors were mental health issues, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, and current or recent family breakdown.
- 13 children died during what appears to be, or has been identified as, a psychotic episode or other mental illness experienced by the offender at the time of the fatal incident.
- Four children died in circumstances where harm was not the intention of an action; primarily in circumstances where drugs were administered to pacify or sedate children.