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NSW Ombudsman

## **Special report to Parliament**

### **Improving probity standards for funded organisations**

The NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour tabled a report to Parliament this morning entitled *Improving probity standards for funded organisations*.

Each year, 3,000 organisations are given approximately \$2 billion in funding and subsidies to deliver a wide range of community services. The current approach to service delivery suggests this will only increase in the future.

These services are often provided to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

Our broad role monitoring the delivery of community services across NSW has shown that the systems in place around screening employees in funded organisations, or probity screening, are inadequate and in need of improvement. We have seen cases where organisations fail to conduct basic checks on prospective employees with histories of violence, fraud and substance abuse.

**‘The current approach to probity checking across the health and human service sectors is haphazard and ineffective’** the Ombudsman said. **‘There needs to be a consistent approach to assessing the integrity, character and honesty of prospective employees, board or management committee members and volunteers who are, or are likely to be, engaged by government-funded services.’**

**‘There needs to be a baseline probity checking requirement for all government funded services, and providers need clear guidance on what they must do.’**

**‘We place a great deal of trust in these organisations’** said Mr Barbour. **‘We are trusting them to provide a service on behalf of us all, and it is vital there are systems in place to support that trust.’**

When government agencies fund non-government organisations to provide health and human services, they must ensure that there are proper and adequate probity checking standards in place.

The Ombudsman said **‘we have to strike the right balance. Those providing services should not be hampered by unnecessary processes and red tape. At the same time, we have to ensure that all potential risks posed by those hired or volunteering to provide care and support are effectively identified and managed.’**