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Report of Reviewable Deaths in 2007 **Volume 2: Child Deaths**

Media Release Part 1:

Today the Ombudsman Bruce Barbour tabled the second volume of his report on reviewable deaths in 2007.

The Ombudsman reviews the deaths of children if they or their sibling have been the subject of a risk of harm report in the three years before they die, or if they die in suspicious circumstances or as a result of abuse or neglect.

Children who died in 2007

In 2007, 603 children and young people died in NSW. 162 (27%) were reviewable deaths. Of these:

- 152 (94%) of the children or their siblings had been the subject of a risk of harm report to DoCs in the three years before their deaths.
- 43 (27%) of the children died in circumstances of abuse, neglect or in suspicious circumstances.
- 83 (51%) of the children were less than a year old. 40 were less than four weeks old, and many had not been discharged from hospital following their birth.
- 36 (22%) of the children were Aboriginal. This was 62% of Aboriginal children who died in NSW.

There has been an increase in the number of reviewable deaths in 2007. This is not an indication of worsening practice by agencies. This is largely a reflection of a substantial increase in the number of children and families the subject of reports.

However, we continue to have concerns about:

- the adequacy of identification and reporting of risk of harm to children
- the capacity of DoCS to assess risk
- the quality of response from agencies
- the standard of interagency coordination and cooperation

“These are not new problems” the Ombudsman said. **“We have raised these repeatedly in past reports – I am pleased the Wood Commission identified the same failings, and has made recommendations aimed at overcoming them.”**

Where to from here?

“The government has accepted most of the Wood Commission’s recommendations, and a new Act has been passed which will see significant changes to the system in NSW” the Ombudsman said. **“As a result, I have chosen not to make any specific recommendations to agencies in this report.”**

In respect to the review of child deaths in NSW:

- Reviewable deaths will now only include deaths that occur in suspicious circumstances or as a result of abuse or neglect. This will mean we will no longer be looking at the same number of deaths as in previous years.
- The Ombudsman will report every two years, rather than every year.
- Finally, the Ombudsman will convene and provide support to the Child Death Review Team (CDRT).

“These changes will still afford the opportunity for careful scrutiny and oversight of reviewable deaths and the systems in place to prevent child deaths” the Ombudsman said. **“We will monitor these changes closely.”**