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Ombudsman report on the deaths of people with disabilities in care

The NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, today tabled in Parliament volume one of his report of reviewable deaths.

This volume concerns the deaths in 2005 of 67 people with disabilities who lived in the care of disability services or licensed boarding houses. They included:

- 26 people who lived in accommodation provided by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC)
- 28 people who lived in non-government accommodation funded by DADHC
- 13 people who lived in licensed boarding houses

The report emphasises the vital role that disability and health services play in the lives of people with disabilities in care.

“Many of the people with disabilities whose deaths we review are highly vulnerable,” said the Ombudsman, Mr Barbour. **“In the main, they are heavily dependent on the people who provide their care to ensure that their daily needs are met, and that they receive services – including health care – that many of us take for granted.”**

The work of the Ombudsman has identified a number of areas for improvement in the delivery of services to people with disabilities in care. These include:

- The identification and management of risks facing people in care, including risks associated with swallowing and nutrition
- The planning done by services to meet the needs of individuals, including needs related to serious health issues
- The response to critical incidents, including the provision of first aid

The report also highlights concerns about the provision of health services to people with disabilities in care, many of whom have multiple and complex health needs. These concerns include:

- The quality of discharge planning for people with disabilities admitted to hospital
- The adequacy of documentation and consultation in relation to end-of-life decision-making for people with disabilities in hospital

- Access of people with disabilities in care to health services, including hospitals, therapy, mental health and dental services.

“Our work has raised questions about how well the health system is responding to the needs of people with disabilities in care,” Mr Barbour said.

The Ombudsman has directed 28 recommendations to NSW Health and to DADHC.

“We will closely monitor the progress agencies make in addressing the issues raised by our work,” said Mr Barbour. **“This report emphasises the need for significant and sustained work to ensure that people with disabilities in care receive a fair go and obtain the range of health care and support services that they need, when they need them.”**

Copies of the Ombudsman’s report will be available at: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au shortly after 12pm.