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NSW Ombudsman

## **Report of Reviewable Deaths in 2010 and 2011**

### **Volume one: Child Deaths**

NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour tabled a biennial report to Parliament today under the *Community Services (Complaints, Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993* concerning his review of the deaths of 77 children in 2010 and 2011.

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. Of these 77 children:

- 27 died as a result of abuse (24) or in circumstances suspicious of abuse (3)
- 21 died as a result of neglect (14) or in circumstances suspicious of neglect (7)
- 29 died while in care.

Two-thirds of the families of children who died had a child protection history. **“This report, as with others before it, again highlights a lack of capacity within Community Services in the time period leading up to these deaths to respond to children at risk of significant harm”** said Mr Barbour. **“In some cases, families had been the subject of frequent reports. We found that risk was not adequately assessed, or not assessed at all because of competing priorities and gaps in casework.”**

The two years covered by the report coincided with the implementation of *Keep Them Safe*, a significant and wide-ranging reform plan for child protection in NSW. **“I hope and expect that the current reforms will result in real improvements in the capacity and performance of agencies with child protection responsibilities”** the Ombudsman said. **“Because of these reforms, I have made no specific recommendations to Community Services in this report.”**

The Ombudsman has made two recommendations to the Ministry of Health. One relates to the current response to parents with mental illness. **“Just over half of the offenders in abuse-related deaths of children showed some level of mental health concern. Mental illness of a parent or carer was a directly contributing factor in the fatal assault deaths of four children.”** Mr Barbour said.

**“While mental health services focussed on the needs of an individual, our reviews have shown that they were not always cognisant of the needs of patients as parents, or of the possible impact of the parent’s mental health concerns on children. It is vital mental health services understand and support the needs of patients and provide treatment within their parenting and family contexts.”**