

Media Release

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Commissioner to have strengthened oversight of Victorian Disability Services

The Victorian Government has committed to enhancing the powers of the Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) to investigate matters of abuse, assault or neglect in Victorian disability services.

The Government's response to the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Abuse in Disability Services* was released this week by the Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing. The Government has accepted a number of the Inquiry's recommendations that relate to DSC, notably committing to:

1. commencing legislative work to allow for own motion investigation powers
2. mandatory reporting of incidents to DSC, including referrals of abuse and neglect, by the Community Visitors Board
3. establishing a memorandum of understanding with the Coroner to review deaths that occur within disability services
4. an annual review of deaths in disability services
5. developing a protocol between Victoria Police and DSC to clarify roles and processes around the investigation of complaints and allegations of abuse and neglect

This expanded oversight and new own motion powers for DSC reflect the need for fundamental change in the sector to address the endemic issues of abuse highlighted in the Parliamentary Inquiry. These same issues have been highlighted by DSC over time including in a 2012 paper titled *Safeguarding People's Right to be Free from Abuse*.

Mr Laurie Harkin AM, Disability Services Commissioner, says "My office has seen a three-fold increase in the past two years in the number of complaints received that relate to allegations of abuse, assault and neglect. While this increase is more likely to reflect a growing understanding and reporting in the sector of what constitutes abuse rather than an increase in the number of incidents, it nonetheless represents an ongoing issue that must be addressed by all involved in the disability sector."

Mr Harkin says "I welcome these new measures as a way to further strengthen current safeguards for the rights of people with a disability. I look forward to working with government to discuss implementation, resourcing and rollout of these changes in the weeks to come."

-ENDS-

Media Enquiries

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About the Disability Services Commissioner

The Disability Services Commissioner (DSC) is an independent voice promoting rights and resolving complaints about disability services in Victoria. DSC was established in 2007 under the *Disability Act 2006* to provide a free and confidential complaints resolution process.