



NEW NSW CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

Sunday, 24 January 2010

The NSW Government today announced the start of the State's new child protection and reporting system – to better support vulnerable children, young people and families.

It is one of the most comprehensive overhauls of child protection in the nation.

Community Services receives more than 300,000 reports a year and is struggling to get to every case despite record budgets and staff numbers.

From today, other government agencies, including Police, Health, Education, Juvenile Justice and Ageing and Disability, along with Non Government Organisations, will have a bigger role to play when it comes to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people.

This will free up Community Services caseworkers to concentrate on the most serious cases of child abuse and neglect.

About 75 per cent of all reports to the Child Protection Helpline are from teachers, doctors, nurses, police officers and other mandatory reporters. The new reporting protocol will make it easier for Community Services to identify children at risk of significant harm.

Child Wellbeing Units will now be established in four government departments and agencies:

- NSW Health
- NSW Police
- Education and Training, and
- Human Services.

Less serious cases from reporters in these agencies will be referred to the Child Wellbeing Units where they will be assessed and support will be provided to vulnerable children and families.

Premier, Kristina Keneally, said the new system is part of the State government's plan to provide more support to families so they can keep their children safe.

“Our plan will increase the assistance to parents and families before they reach crisis point and their children are taken into foster care,” Ms Keneally said.

“From today, we begin a new era where keeping children safe is a responsibility shared by the whole community.

“In his review into the NSW child protection system, Special Commissioner James Wood, said Community Services should not be solely responsible for keeping children safe.

“Children’s care is the responsibility of families, friends, neighbours, government – because it really does take a community to raise a child.”

Minister for Community Services Linda Burney said the changes coming into effect are part of the NSW Government's \$750 million action plan *Keep Them Safe*, developed in response to Special Commissioner James Wood's 12-month inquiry into child protection services in NSW.

The changes include:

- **A new reporting protocol where only children at 'risk of significant harm' are reported to Community Services. Where children are below this new threshold, NGOs and other government agencies will work together to support vulnerable children and families;**
- **Expansion of prevention and early intervention services so that families can get the help they need before they reach crisis point. For example, there will be more investment in sustained health home visiting, drug and alcohol services for families, services to support children of parents with a mental illness and other family support services;**
- **New laws allowing for increased sharing of information between agencies where it may ensure the safety and wellbeing of children;**
- **A bigger role for NGOs in delivering services for children and families;**
- **Changes to Children's Court processes such as the appointment of a District Court judge as President of the Children's Court and requiring that Children's Registrars be legally qualified;**
- **The recruitment of out-of-home-care coordinators in the Department of Education and Training and Department of Health and home liaison officers and Aboriginal liaison officers in the Department of Education and Training;**
- **New definitions for statutory, supported and voluntary out-of-home care;**
- **Increased support for Aboriginal children and families;**
- **Enhanced acute services such as intensive family preservation;**
- **Expansion and reform of the out-of-home care sector;**
- **Access to new and existing services will be improved by the establishment soon of Family Referral Services being piloted in three areas and based in Mount Druitt, Dubbo and Newcastle. They will be operated by non-government organisations and will offer alternative, voluntary pathways to help families.**

Ms Burney said the Child Wellbeing Units start work today after months of planning and training.

"To date, more than 23,000 reporters have attended information sessions about the new system. The Government has also made available information and training packages to more than 200,000 people who work with children and young people. The packages include written materials, a DVD, e-learning materials and tailored agency training," Ms Burney said.

"Since November 2007, when Special Commissioner Wood handed down his report, I have been working closely with the non-government sector. None of this would have been possible without their input and support.

"The Community Services Child Protection Helpline will continue to deal with all enquiries from the public and other mandatory reporters and, while the new system gets up and running, will still provide advice and help mandatory reporters from Government agencies."