

A Way Forward

Implementation of actions in response to the
Review of Child Protection Services in Tasmania.

Child Protection Services

A Way Forward

The Ministers responsible for Health and Human Services, Police and Emergency Management, Justice, Community Development, and Education are committed to the immediate implementation of the following actions in response to the *Review of Child Protection Services in Tasmania*.

ACTION 1: Create an additional twenty assessment positions

Reducing the number of cases on the 'unallocated list' is an immediate priority for child protection services.

An additional twenty short-term assessment positions will be created to reduce the list during the next six months.

ACTION 2: Ensure referrals appropriately identify the most vulnerable children

Since the introduction of mandatory reporting, child protection workers efforts have been spread over a wide group of children. In some cases notifications are received regarding children in families who have more general welfare needs.

Child protection efforts will be focussed more closely on the most vulnerable children.

New positions will be created to enable an experienced child protection worker to be assigned to each region. These four additional staff will:

- Engage school communities, teachers, police officers, health professionals to enable them to better identify and assist at risk families regions
- Participate in case conferences
- Participate in family meetings and visits
- Provide training sessions for staff at the local level

ACTION 3: Implement new structure for Children and Family Services

A new organisational structure for Children and Family services will be in place by early 2007.

The new structure creates four regional teams. The boundaries of the teams will mirror those of the Department of Education and the Department of Police and Emergency Management. This will make collaboration easier between departments.

The regional teams will include a wide range of key services, to support children and families, including:

- Child, family, health services;
- Therapeutic and support services; and
- Child protection services.

The manager of each regional team will be advertised at Senior Executive Service Level 1 level in the next few weeks and filled before the end of 2006.

Regional managers will work closely with their colleagues in other agencies and also with existing non-government services, such as neighbourhood houses and community organisations, to improve access to support services.

A new model to provide a therapeutic response for children that have been traumatised by child abuse is also being developed. Non-government services will be involved in its development.

ACTION 4: Build the capacity for government and non-government community based services to provide support and assistance to children and families

The report places a strong emphasis on building the capacity of government and non-government services to support children and their families at the local community level. This means utilising the existing infrastructure and services such as:

- schools;
- child health services; and
- neighbourhood houses.

These community level services are the foundation for building more robust and accessible services to families in need.

An immediate planning project will be undertaken with family support services in order to utilise non-government support services more effectively to support children and families.

Funding will be provided to the Family Support Services Association to enable it to work with the Department on this project over the next six months.

The successful *Early Support Pilot Program*, which has funded non-government organisations to work with selected children and families referred to the child protection system, will be maintained.

ACTION 5: All relevant areas within Department of Health and Human Services will prioritise child protection issues

The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services has committed to implement the Review's recommendations and ensure that child protection is a priority within the agency.

This includes:

- Joint planning with Drug and Alcohol Services
- Joint planning with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to give at risk children priority access
- Human Resources fast-tracking organisational and structural changes and ensure positions are filled
- Communications Services will develop communication bulletins and websites to keep staff informed and involved

ACTION 6: Improve and build upon workforce development initiatives

A new workforce development team will be established in children and family services. This team will:

- Ensure all new staff receive appropriate induction;
- Identify opportunities for staff to improve their professional qualifications through enrolment in the new early years degree at the University of Tasmania; and
- Plan further professional learning opportunities for all staff.

Scholarships totalling \$20 000 will be created for final year social work students at the University of Tasmania to encourage high performing students to enter the child protection system.

ACTION 7: Implement new models for child protection services and out of home care

An expert practitioner has been appointed to work with staff to finalise new models for the structure and organisation of child protection services. This work will provide immediate models for intake services and regional services as well as the after-hours service.

In addition, the same practitioner will develop a new model for out of home care.

The work is beginning next week and models will be developed in the next few months with the new structures implemented during 2007.

ACTION 8: Complete reform of the Information and Communications Technology system

Substantial efforts have already been made to improve Information, Communications and Technology Systems with an investment of \$600,000.

The new system will provide a single, centrally managed database to store and manage child protection information such as:

- notification;
- assessment;
- investigation and;
- referral to service centres.

Child protection workers will be able to:

- undertake advanced searches;
- access whole of state information;
- review, triage and assign notifications from a centralised point;
- manage workflow; and
- notifiers of suspected abuse will be given a notification reference number to assist them to track cases.

Additionally, the system gives Managers better information in order to review and manage staff workload.

ACTION 9: Consolidate work on legislative and policy reform

Work will commence immediately on the legislative amendments recommended in the Review.

Amendments will enable child protection services to:

- become involved with at risk families before a child is born; and
- to place some children in out of home care on a more permanent basis.

Policy work will be fast-tracked so that staff have access to the practice manuals, documentation and guidelines needed to implement the new system.

To cope with the immediate short term needs, experienced policy workers (with a child protection background) will be employed to assist with this task.

ACTION 10: Improve Location of Services

Child protection workers will be more appropriately accommodated in order to improve service delivery.

Some suitable space in school buildings has already been identified and further discussions with the Department of Education are underway.

ACTION 11: Expand the role of Child Protection at the Royal Hobart Hospital

A new position at the Royal Hobart Hospital will be established to support and advise staff at the RHH concerning child protection issues and follow up on their concerns about vulnerable children.

If the model proves successful it will be expanded to the other regions.

ACTION 12: Establish a high-level inter-agency reference group to drive and implement the Action Plan

All relevant government agencies are committed to the Action Plan and will work together to improve child protection services in Tasmania.

The reference group will:

- Implement the Action Plan and monitor its progress over the next five years
- Drive collaboration across government
- Improve existing initiatives
- Enhance community and professional understanding of the importance of child protection in Tasmania
- Undertake planning work to utilise non-government support services more effectively to support children and families who may otherwise require the intervention of child protection services