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Ombudsman reports on DADHC

The NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour has released a report today about the work of the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC) on improving services for children with disabilities.

In April 2004, the NSW Ombudsman was critical of significant deficiencies in the way DADHC implemented its children's policy.

These deficiencies led to inadequate service provision to many families.

Now Mr Barbour has released a follow up report noting that DADHC has made positive steps in dealing with the problems but that much remains to be done.

The Ombudsman's new report – *Services For Children With A Disability And Their Families: Progress And Future Challenges* – details the work DADHC has done since 2004 to improve policy and practice.

'While DADHC has made progress to improve its service delivery to children with disabilities and their families, it is critical that this continues as many of the initiatives are still in their infancy,' Mr Barbour says.

Continuing concerns include children being left in temporary respite beds for extended periods and the adequacy of services for very young children with complex medical needs or complex behavioural problems.

'However, systems to support quality service provision are now in place and DADHC has made a commitment to continuous improvement. Whether these developments result in families receiving the support they need, will require assessment over time', Mr Barbour says.

The Ombudsman says he also acknowledges the NSW Government's new 10-year plan for disability services, which includes a major emphasis on expanding services for children with disabilities and on strengthening the capacity of families to care for them.

The report released today comprises DADHC's children's policy, the Ombudsman's findings in 2004 and the findings of an independent review of the department's responses since then.

The report also contains the Ombudsman's observations about DADHC's progress in improving services for children and young people with a disability and their families.

These observations include that:

- It would be timely for DADHC and the Department of Community Services to evaluate their Memorandum of Understanding on services to children with a disability. The Ombudsman continues to hear reports of the MoU being used to exclude children from services (report reference 5.1.1)
- DADHC is making arrangements to monitor services that it funds but has no such arrangements for its own services, although this is planned for the future (5.1.1)
- As a result of extra funding, an estimated 300 families will receive intensive support services annually. It would be helpful if DADHC told the community how and when the services will be available (5.1.3)
- DADHC has recruited to employ 20 new caseworker consultants but the community has yet to hear where they will be based and whether they will be accessible to non-government services and the families they support (5.1.3)
- Many new family based placements are not yet available. Blocked respite is a significant frustration for families trying to get respite places, especially in rural and regional areas. (5.2.1)