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Report on the deaths of people with disabilities in care

The NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, tabled a report to Parliament this morning on the deaths in 2008 and 2009 of 193 people who lived in the care of disability services or licensed boarding houses.

- 92 people lived in accommodation operated by Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC)
- 68 people lived in non-government accommodation funded by ADHC
- 33 people lived in licensed boarding houses

The Ombudsman's sixth report details progress by ADHC and NSW Health towards meeting key recommendations to minimise risks associated with the deaths of people with disabilities in care.

'I am pleased to see progress in addressing some longstanding and significant concerns, including the introduction of mandatory first aid requirements in disability services and licensed boarding houses,' said Mr Barbour.

'However, there are critical issues that require attention to improve the health outcomes of people with disabilities in care and to reduce preventable deaths.'

The Ombudsman reports that his reviews continue to identify deaths that were preventable, including those where risks had been, or could reasonably have been foreseen, but inadequate action had been taken in response. This includes risks related to choking, drowning, falls, and positioning in bed.

'Many people in disability accommodation services and licensed boarding houses face serious health and safety risks,' said Mr Barbour. **'Our reviews indicate that the work of services and staff to identify and address the risks is often inadequate.'**

The Ombudsman's work has also raised questions about the equitable access of people with disabilities in care to medical specialists, and to community-based health programs such as chronic disease management programs and other out-of-hospital clinical support.

'It is important that, at a minimum, people with disabilities have the same access to health services and programs as everyone else,' Mr Barbour said. **'However, our reviews of the deaths of people in 2008-09 who had chronic disease suggest that this is not always the case.'**

'Our work highlights the pressing need to improve the coordination and provision of health services to people with disabilities. In this regard, I welcome the recent first steps by NSW Health towards establishing a service framework to improve the health of people with intellectual disability.'

The Ombudsman has directed 11 recommendations to ADHC, and five recommendations to NSW Health.