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Ombudsman tables report into DADHC

The NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, today released a special report to Parliament, which highlights the failure of the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care ('DADHC') to effectively support families at risk of giving up the care of their disabled children. The report details the findings of an extensive investigation.

Mr Barbour said: **"My investigation shows that DADHC has failed to adequately support families to enable children with disabilities to remain in the care of their family."**

"Many families who care for children with disabilities already face significant stress. The result of DADHC's ineffective intervention was that this stress was unduly aggravated."

The Ombudsman investigation found that the department's implementation of its policy for children and young people with disabilities demonstrated:

- lack of clarity about the department's role in supporting families in crisis
- uncertainty about which sections of the department had responsibility for providing support
- confusion about the respective roles of DADHC and the Department of Community Services ('DoCS')
- inconsistencies in DADHC's own policy requirements
- inadequate guidance to staff about how to implement the policy
- subsequent confusion about how services should be provided

The Ombudsman said: **"a major concern was that families were not able to get the services necessary to support them through difficult times"**. The investigation found:

- confusion about how to obtain access to services
- no clearly defined decision making process about access to services
- a fragmented and poorly co-ordinated service system

- no clearly defined avenue of appeal where services were denied or considered inadequate

The Ombudsman investigation also found that, for children with disabilities who were not able to remain living with their families, service arrangements were often inadequate.

“These children were not provided with the same safeguards as children who enter care through the child welfare system. ”

The Ombudsman said: **“DADHC has responded to our investigation in a positive way by developing an action plan and establishing a task force to address the problems we have highlighted”**. Strategies within the action plan include addressing staff training needs, implementing an effective system to deal with requests for support, enhancing service access and coordination, and improving the range of available services.

“The key to the department’s improvement in this area will be effective implementation of its action plan. It is an ambitious plan and we will be closely monitoring the department’s progress over the coming year.” Mr Barbour said.