

Embargoed until **10.30am** Thursday 29 June 2017

Ombudsman report of reviewable deaths 2014 and 2015

Acting NSW Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, tabled two reports in Parliament today:

- *Report of reviewable deaths 2014 and 2015: Volume 1: Child deaths*
- *Reporting of Fatal Neglect in NSW.*

The Report of reviewable deaths in 2014 and 2015 examines the deaths of 54 children that occurred in NSW in those two years. The deaths were reviewable because the children died in circumstances of abuse or neglect, or were living in care at the time of their death.

'A key focus of reviewing the deaths of children from abuse or neglect, and those living in care, is to identify practice and systems issues that may contribute to deaths, or may expose other children to risk in the future,' said the Ombudsman.

'In this report we focus on a vulnerable group of young people in care who died by suicide or in risk-taking circumstances. Since 2004, 15 of the 117 children and young people who have died while in care, have died by suicide or in the context of high risk behaviour. The young people all had high and complex needs. My report highlights the critical importance of intensive case management, a consistently supportive and therapeutic care environment, and close monitoring and support of placements,' Professor McMillan said.

We also reviewed 124 deaths from neglect over a 10 year period, from 2006 to 2015. **'Most of the children died in the context of a failure by carers to supervise a child or actions of a carer that endangered a child. The report identified that these deaths often occurred in an environment of neglect. A prominent and disturbing feature in neglect-related deaths was carer alcohol and other drug abuse,'** observed the Ombudsman. We will be looking more closely at the role of alcohol and other drugs in the deaths of children in the coming year.

Separately to our biennial report, the *Reporting of Fatal Neglect in NSW* is the result of work we commissioned from Dr Deborah Scott at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Dr Scott reviewed our reporting of fatal neglect in relation to reporting in other States and countries. While Dr Scott finds that the reporting in NSW is in line with international best practice, she suggests further changes to strengthen a public health approach to the reporting of child deaths in NSW. **'I will seek advice from government and other stakeholders about the proposals made by Dr Scott on improving our capacity to prevent the deaths of children.'**

Read the report on the NSW Ombudsman's website.

29 June 2017 (TRIM: 2017/113404; ADM/2016/686)