



MINISTER GARBUTT TABLES ANNUAL CHILD DEATH REVIEW

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The Minister for Children, Sherryl Garbutt, today released the annual independent review of the deaths of children who have been in contact with the child protection system.

Ms Garbutt said the report indicated there had been 16 child deaths in Victoria in 2004.

"Any child death is one too many and is heartbreaking and distressing for the family and carers involved," Ms Garbutt said.

"This annual review examines each death to understand why the child died and to develop new ways to strengthen care for all vulnerable children in Victoria.

"The Government is reforming the child protection system to better protect at-risk children everywhere."

The Victorian Child Death Review Committee examines the deaths of all children who have been current clients of child protection or whose death has occurred within three months of child protection ending its involvement.

"The number of child deaths can vary considerably from year to year. For instance, in 2001 there were 12 deaths, in 2002 there were 32 deaths and 12 deaths in 2003," Ms Garbutt said.

"The review committee recognises that there are no meaningful trends in the number of deaths that occur each year."

In 2004, there were 16 child deaths. Four were from acquired illnesses such as heart disease, two from SIDS, three from accidents and two were from drug/substance related activities. In the remaining five cases the cause of death was unknown or had not yet been determined by the Coroner.

Three of the 16 children had little or no involvement with child protection prior to their deaths.

"As in previous years, most of the child deaths were due to acquired illness and disease or accidents," Ms Garbutt said.

The Government's reform of the child protection and family support system is well underway.

"The major system overhaul will ensure it can better cope with the complex needs of at-risk children and families, and deliver services earlier to families under pressure," Ms Garbutt said.

"We have invested an additional \$121 million since 1999 to change the system but we recognise there is still much work to be done."

Key Bracks Government reforms include:

- Appointment of Bernie Geary as Victoria's first Child Safety Commissioner to monitor child safety – particularly for vulnerable children,
- A \$60 million four-year strategy to improve Victoria's family support and child protection system including 60 new child protection officers and the \$20 million Take Two service, which will identify and treat children who have suffered severe abuse and neglect;
- In the 2005-06 State Budget, an additional \$101.8 million for children's services including \$19.7 million expansion of the Family Support Innovation Projects to provide early intervention and support services to vulnerable families,
- A review of the Children and Young Person's Act 1989, with an exposure draft to be released in the coming months. New legislation will be introduced in the Spring Session.

"Protecting children is everyone's business and we are urging the Victorian community to work with us in the reform process," Ms Garbutt said.

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