

MEDIA RELEASE

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TROUBLED BACKGROUNDS IDENTIFIED IN REVIEW

The troubled family backgrounds of children who died last year while involved with child protection authorities highlighted the need for services to work together, according to the Chair of the Victorian Child Death Review Committee (VCDRC), Lisa Ward.

Ms Ward's comments followed the tabling in State Parliament today of the VCDRC 2005 Annual Report on the deaths of 16 children and young people involved with the state's Child Protection Service in 2004.

"The death of each child is tragic and distressing and, on behalf of the VCDRC, I extend my sympathy to the families and friends of all these children and to the professionals who provided support and assistance," Ms Ward said.

Ms Ward said that most of the deaths were due to acquired illness including congenital conditions and accidents.

"Five children died for reasons unknown or yet to be determined by the coroner, four from acquired illness, three from accidents, two from SIDS and two from drug/substance related activities.

"There were no deaths of Aboriginal children known to Child Protection in 2004.

"The VCDRC has not observed any meaningful trends in the number of deaths that occur annually - with 12 deaths in 2003, 32 in 2002, and 12 in 2001.

"The Committee believes it is important to look beyond the numbers and examine the way in which vulnerable children and families are supported as a means of driving improvement."

"To this end, we have continued to conduct detailed reviews of child death inquiries relating to deaths that occurred over the past three years.

"In this process, the Committee found examples of excellent case practice as well as cases where risk assessment, case planning, and collaboration between services were below expected standards.

"We also note the ongoing challenge of delivering culturally sensitive services to Aboriginal children and families who are over represented in the child protection population.

"The Committee acknowledges the inherently difficult work undertaken by Child Protection workers on a daily basis.

VICTORIAN CHILD DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE

“Most of the children who died came from families with multiple and complex needs.

“Eighty-five per cent had at least one parent with long standing drug use issues, most had experienced family violence, many were transient and more than 40 per cent had at least one parent with a mental illness.

“These family characteristics show just how vulnerable children who come into contact with child protection services are in the first instance and why is it so important to address the cumulative impact of trauma and neglect in their young lives.

“It also highlight the need for services to adopt a sense of shared responsibility in working with Victoria’s most at risk families, “ Ms Ward said.

A special study included in the Annual Report found that children with complex medical needs, including infants born with serious and life threatening conditions, were particularly vulnerable and required a highly collaborative response from child protection, disability and medical services.

The VCDRC provides an independent, external review of child death inquiries conducted by the Department of Human Services.

Media contact: Jennene Rodgers on 9616 7701 or 0422 413 508