

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Children's Commissioner's 2012-2013 Annual Report

The NT Children's Commissioner, Dr Howard Bath, is pleased to report the release of the 2012-13 Annual Report. The report provides an overview of the performance of the statutory functions and activities conducted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

**Complaints management.** In 2012-13, the Commissioner received 110 approaches concerning 150 children. These approaches resulted in the undertaking of 68 preliminary investigations. Fifty-five matters were deemed to be valid complaints and dealt with under section 266 of the *Care and Protection of Children Act* (the Act). Four themes emerged in the complaints received:

- a perceived 'under-response' by the then Office for Children and Families to notifications of harm from professionals;
- concerns about inappropriate behaviour management practices being used by correctional, residential and foster care workers;
- a lack of support services being provided for families; and
- allegedly inadequate responses to allegations of sexual abuse.

**Monitoring the administration of the Act.** Some practice improvements noted last year (relating to a reduced number of unallocated cases, response times to notifications, and carer registrations) were still evident this year. However, other problematic areas remain unchanged and new concerns have emerged. One such concern is that there has been a 25% increase in notifications received but a decrease in both the number of investigations conducted and a major fall (22%) in substantiations of harm. The number of children with repeat substantiations within 12 months remains unacceptably high at 20 per cent.

In 2012-13, sexual abuse substantiations in the NT represented only one per cent of the total substantiations of harm. There has been a marked decrease since 2008-09 when sexual abuse accounted for 10 per cent of substantiations. The NT rate of one per cent contrasts with the national average in 2011-12 of 13 per cent. The percentage of sexual abuse notifications being converted into substantiations has also decreased over that period from 10 per cent to three per cent. This effectively means that for every 100 notifications received about alleged sexual abuse, three are substantiated.

The substantiation rate for NT Aboriginal children is around the national average (47.3 per 1,000) though the placement rate (22.4 per 1,000) is the lowest in the country, almost three times lower than the national average. Dr Bath, said "It is clear that the child protection system is now identifying many Aboriginal children who are 'at-risk', but relatively few are placed into protective care, and limited family support and treatment services are available to assist struggling parents".

Reviews were also conducted for specific areas of practice including care plans, leaving care plans, contact with children in care, use of Temporary Placement Arrangements and leaving care support. Key findings included: 1. fewer than half of the care plans on file were current; 2. very little planning is being undertaken for young people leaving care; and 3. few Aboriginal children have plans that adequately address their cultural care needs. The reviews also indicated that there has been a reduction in the level of direct case worker contact with children in care – with only 69 per cent of the children having direct contact with caseworkers in the two month period prior to the review date. More specifics regarding the reviews are contained in Chapter 4 of the report.

**For more information contact Adam Harwood on: 8999 6076. The Annual Report is located at <http://www.childrenscommissioner.nt.gov.au/publications.html>**

