

MEDIA RELEASE

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Children's Commissioner's 2013-2014 Annual Report

The NT Children's Commissioner, Dr Howard Bath, is pleased to report the release of his 2013-14 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.

In the 2013-14 year, the number of notifications being received by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for suspected abuse or neglect of children, has increased by a very significant 30 per cent. The number of child protection investigations DCF has undertaken also increased at almost the same rate (29%). However, this increase in workload has contributed to a finding that only 43 per cent of investigations are being completed within the target of 28 days.

The number of these overdue investigations has risen quite significantly. On 30 June 2012, there were 389 overdue investigations; by 30 June 2014 the number had risen to 839. On that same date there were a further 321 child protection cases that had not yet been allocated for investigation, making for a total of 1,160 unresolved investigations. The Children's Commissioner, Dr Howard Bath said "the significant increase in demand for investigations appears to be affecting the Department's ability to respond to the needs of at-risk children in a timely and effective manner."

There also continues to be an increase in the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care with a 27 per cent increase in one year. Since 30 June 2010 there has been an 81 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal children in care. In spite of this, the NT still has one of the lowest Aboriginal out-of-care placement rates in Australia.

It is positive to note that there has been a marked improvement in the quality of the care plans that my office sampled in 2013-14. In 95 per cent of the cases the children had a care plan present, however, the biggest improvement was in the percentage of plans that were current - up from 44 per cent last year to 77 per cent as of 30 June 2014.

Forty per cent of the young people reviewed had a leaving care plan; whilst still low, this is a major improvement on the 17 per cent obtained last year. A major concern highlighted was the continuing lack of appropriate accommodation options available to young people when they transition out of care.

The regularity of caseworkers' face to face contact with children has also improved on last year's results, but has not returned to the 2011-12 levels.

The report also includes information on the Commissioner's complaint management function.

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

