

Child protection reform implementation

In response to the findings of the Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care, the Queensland Government has initiated a number of reforms to state child protection systems. This reform process has the support of both the Labor and Liberal/National parties.

Peter Forster was appointed by the Queensland Government on 6 January 2004 to implement the recommendations of the Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care, and the Final Report on Phase One of the Audit of Foster Carers Subject to Child Protection Notifications.

The Child Protection Implementation Unit, led by Peter Forster, will deliver the reform implementation program in three phases. Phase one will see the development of a project plan to deliver recommendations; phase two will see the development of the blueprint for the new Department of Child Safety; and phase three will see the implementation of the blueprint.

The Unit released an Implementation Blueprint on 22 March 2004, which outlines the strategy, plans and processes to improve the child protection system in Queensland. This includes an implementation strategy for the new Department of Child Safety. This department was created following the re-election of the Queensland Labor Government on 7 February 2004, to focus exclusively on the needs of children at risk from harm, neglect or abuse.

Copies of the full report Protecting Children can be downloaded at www.cmc.qld.gov.au/FCINQUIRY/ To request a printed copy, contact: The Crime and Misconduct Commission, Queensland. Phone: (07) 3360 6060.

Copies of the Implementation Blueprint can be downloaded at www.premiers.qld.gov.au/childprotection/blueprint/

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AUSTRALIAN CHILD PROTECTION

Statistics

The latest *Child Protection Australia 2002–2003* report has recently been published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. A summary of the latest statistics are provided below.

Between 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2003:

- 198,355 notifications were made to statutory child protection departments nationally.
- 40,416 cases of abuse/neglect were substantiated or confirmed across the nation.

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
Notifications 2002-2003	109,498	37,635	31,068	2,293	13,442	741	2,124	1,554
Percentage of notifications where child abuse and neglect were substantiated in 2002-2003	15%	19%	39%	39%	18%	29%	15%	21%
Number of substantiations per 1000 children	7.5	6.3	10.1	1.9	5.8	1.8	3.6	3.9

The maltreatment involved in the substantiated cases of abuse or neglect was classified as follows:

- 34 per cent emotional abuse
- 28 per cent neglect
- 28 per cent physical abuse
- 10 per cent sexual abuse

There is broad variation in the rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect among children aged between 0-16 years of age (per 1000 children) between the states and territories. This broad range is influenced by differences in the way jurisdictions both define and deal with notifications and investigations.

In Victoria, for example, the definition of a notification is very broad and may include family issues that are responded to without the need for a formal investigation process. In contrast, in Western Australia and Tasmania, reports to the departments are screened before being classified as a notification. Only those reports where maltreatment is indicated are classified as a notification and the majority of these cases are subsequently investigated. In addition, in Western Australia, the disproportionately low number of notifications and rate of substantiation (per 1000 children) is likely to be due to the fact that reporting of child abuse and neglect is not mandatory.